Chrome Shelled Regios Volume15

source : http://www.baka-tsuki.org/project/index.php?title=Chrome_Shelled_Regios:Volume15

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鋼殻のレギオス15

ネクスト・ブルーム

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CHROME SHELLED REGIOS

15 ネクスト・ブルーム

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15 ネクスト・ブルーム

「貴様に止めさせはしない！」
――正しさなんて知らない

「おれたちの私情に、
後輩を巻き込むな」

「そんなあなたを見たくて、
ツェルニに来たわけではないですよ」

Prologue: The One Biding Time

The time of impatience had come. What a season that made one feel impatient. One could not calm down in this season. It was a time that caused impatience. Karian felt this feeling inside the Student President's room. The repairing work was still in progress outside his window, but that too was about to end. You weren't able to see as many of the tall heavy machineries that had originally been desperately needed.

Destruction and rebirth. The things left behind and the new things springing up. The scenery of Zuellni included both old and new, a scenery that was no longer the one that Karian was familiar with.

"Things full of memories are changing. Makes me feel lonely."

"Isn't this feeling of regret a bit too early for you?"

One could see Vance's troubled expression reflected in the window. He was reading a report.

"But the things before us can be called memories considering that we might once more stand on that piece of earth, right?"

"Humph," Vance made a snorting noise through his nose.

"Compared to regret, there are mountains of things to do for the plan to revitalize the city."

"Oh, I did that deliberately."

"How troublesome."

"Because I can only forget it when I'm very busy."

"Isn't it more moderate to slowly enjoy it?"

Vance closed his mouth and watched Karian's expression on the glass.

"Aahh...."

He seemed to be saying something, but Karian pretended he hadn't heard him.

"You've also become a troublesome guy."

"Don't mind me."

It was changing. This must be it if there was such thing as "fate" in the Academy City. The Academy City must be changed into one that wasn't like an Academy City. But didn't it mean the death of the Electronic Fairy too? The Electronic Fairy should be the one to choose the future of this city.

There didn't exist change that was painless.

Then this must be sadness that was necessary.

The scenery in his memory no longer existed out the window. The people of Zuellni below the window had also changed just like the scenery.

They turned around to look at the person who had been their good classmate and friend for a long time. There wouldn't be that many chances to see his worrisome face anymore.

And then Karian began to ponder the next thing. The thing he saw on that day inside the central area of the Mechanical Department in Zuellni the Electronic Fairy.

Thinking of the person he met.

Thinking of the oath he swore.

(If the world wants to push us to the brink of despair.....)

He didn't need to confirm his mental preparation because he already knew what to do. He didn't need to think about it anymore . He had already reached his goal in Zuellni, but could he reach the next goal?

(No. This isn't their problem anymore.)

He throttled his discomfort. The glass faintly reflected his normal expression. It's okay. I haven't collapsed yet. The enemy is strong. The future is my enemy. All I can do is do my best in order to reach that goal. I cannot relax on the current road so that I can head for my next path.

(Then I must not let down my guard as I walk the remainder of this path.)

Karian's declaration, or was it his joke. Understanding that part, Vance's expression turned from usual to sour.

Karian fell back into deep thought at that.

Time was flowing.

Chapter 1: The Resolute One, The Wavering One

Layfon realized that he was remembering something from long ago.

The half destroyed palace. The figure of his childhood friend, and reuniting with her on the mountain of debris. Her wearing an eyepatch, a face he had never seen before, showing to him a figure he had never seen before. And all of these things were losing clarity in his mind.

He had jumped up, awakened by the dream and gradually spacing out. Was time really flowing? Had everything become nothing through time?

He didn't know. Time was flowing without knowing anything. The morning turned to dusk. It repeated this cycle again and again , and this was all that told Layfon time was flowing.

"What're you doing?"

A panting voice came from behind him as he watched the sun with a blank state of mind. He turned around and saw his classmate, who was also wearing a working suit. His rotund body was swaying from exhaustion. The sweat on his body was rushing out like steam.

"Ah, sorry."

In a fluster, Layfon stuffed the bundles of wheat onto the truck with the spear used for farming.

"Ah, though this is to move the resources, why did I have to choose this?"

A moment afterwards, the truck was loaded with wheat. The classmate showed a faint expression at that and raised his hand.

"Wanna swap?"

"No. You must be very tired."

The classmate then pulled the truck with him. Layfon watched him leave and then went to load other trucks.

He was working on a farm. This was temporary. He saw this job with his classmate while looking for work because of lack of money.

He was taking a break because there were still many bundles of wheat to move. His classmate who had finished eating his lunch was lying on the bench.

"Ahh. This is tiring but the food is great."

A helpless smile appeared on Layfon's face.

"Speaking of which, have you found a place to move into?"

"Not yet....."

"Better hurry up with that. I found mine by chance, but..."

"But isn't Edo the number one dormitory?"

"The conditions are great, and it's close to school. It's because the seniors are about to graduate. If I had waited longer, the booking would have come rushing in and no one would have paid me any attention."

"Uh....."

"..... It's all thanks to the middleman. Ahh, there's this person – the price of rent is unbelievably low."

Even the call of an uncomfortable voice would only be sucked in by the echoless, endless sky and the farm before them.

One year had passed. This was the most intense period for the Academy City. Not only did the sixth years graduate, but students of other years were also out for activities. For example, wanting to take the houses of the graduates because the housing conditions were better; or those who had to give up their houses because of the anticipation of new first year students. The classmate belonged to the former group, and Layfon was the latter.

The season of graduation was drawing near.

The season of parting. Layfon, first time experiencing this season, felt uncomfortable. The atmosphere of the Academy was slowly fading, and this was eating him up.

"Ahh, I'm jealous of the new dormitory that is to be built for the regeneration plan. It's not possible for me now. But speaking of which, Layfon, why don't you live there? You should have priority because of your marks in Military Arts."

"I was spacing out and so missed the deadline."

"I see."

The classmate said nothing else to him afterwards, feeling that Layfon wasn't at his best.

It was such an unusual crisis to have enshrouded the entire Grendan, but the Military Artists had to concentrate on protecting Zuellni. But then almost no one knew of the truth. Many students were only hovering on the level of feeling the terror that emanated from the filth monsters, and understanding the insanity of Lance Shelled City – Grendan.

This was all they knew. The terror of the filth monsters. Military Artists who had experienced this crisis were training themselves so as to prevent the same thing from happening again. This way of thinking was strong in them, but there were also many who were tortured by terror. It was rumored that many Military Arts students had gone to find a psychologist.

But this was all there was to it.

This battle was hiding something unbelievable.

Only Leerin was in it.

And this was what was plaguing Layfon. Helplessness. He wanted to board a roaming bus right now and go back to Grendan.

But, he couldn't.

Leerin didn't wish for it. And he couldn't react to her feeling.

He had confirmed something at that time. How strong was his reaction? It wasn't such a small things as to move his feet. He had confirmed something, and perhaps it was all because he was too insensitive to his own feelings.

"Ah ~ the election. They even put a poster here."

At his classmate's words, Layfon's attention turned to the poster stuck on the wall of the rest room.

The election of the Student President was about to begin.

"You didn't come with us. They randomly picked who was to leave the dormitory, and so you lost."

"Uh, yeah. I didn't come."

He stared at the sky as he replied to his classmate's various questions. He was watching a sky empty of things, and the truth was there was only the sky for him to see.

But Grendan's sky was also the same.

Minse breathed in deeply at the pressure of the black eyepatch.

This was the house of Eutnohl. He was facing two people in the most formal living room and he couldn't move his gaze from one of them.

"The introduction is a bit late, but this child is Leerin. She's Herder's daughter, so she is your niece."

"Yes."

The Queen held no complaints to her own unclear introduction.

Several months had passed since that battle. Half of the palace had been rebuilt. The functions of a royal palace were being performed by Alsheyra's home, the mansion of House Almonise. The rebuilding of the administration building was finished. Alsheyra and Leerin, who have been living in the home of Almonise, suddenly paid a visit to him.

"Ahh, I'm sorry. I've wanted to introduce her earlier, but the ministers like Lee-chan too much."

"I see....."

The girl who had been honestly sitting next to Alsheyra felt more and more insignificant. Minse finally moved his gaze from her eyepatch to view her fully.

Did she look like his royal brother Herder?

The hair color was different. His brother, and himself. The dark hair that characterized the three royal families of Grendan. Leerin's face also looked different. But she seemed to look similar to her mother. Minse couldn't remember much but he knew of Meifar Stadt, who had been a maid in the Eutnohl family. He remembered she had gold hair, and she was a lively girl. It was hard to get a sense of Meifar from Leerin's tense expression, but he could see a bit of her mother in her face.

His brother and Meifar and their child. He thought they weren't in Grendan anymore. But now. This girl had grown up in the same orphanage as Layfon.

He never thought his brother had left the city, abandoning his child here. Then.....? He thought a bit more but couldn't say anything else. The thing hidden by Leerin's eyepatch should be able to explain everything. That must be it.

"You should have seen me during the funeral. Us two. But it must be your first time hearing my name. I'm....."

"Leerin. You belong to the Eutnohl family. The Queen has acknowledged you, and so have I. Either way, you're part of the Eutnohl family," he warned quietly about including Leerin's name in the family records.

"Uh, your words are so like before. Isn't this just the same as the time when you scolded Layfon in anger?"

"..... How many years ago was that? And I still hate him."

"Oh, so honest."

"I feel narrow-hearted if I don't admit this. Besides, it'll be troublesome for my spiritual life."

"So boring."

He was used to Alsheyra's attitude. He ignored her and turned to Leerin once more. Leerin's expression turned tense at the mention of Layfon. Minse said he hated him. He couldn't hide his feeling, but perhaps he might be giving out a wrong impression.

"You don't have to prepare Leerin's room there."

"Ah, that's been taken care of. Ah, but I still want to notify the school. The ministers want some opinions, so they have prepared her room in the palace."

"Perhaps someone with your unstable personality wouldn't be able to understand, but it's better for her to live at home, especially with how young she is."

"But the ministers."

"I've been wanting to ask why did the ministers appear there?"

"....."

"I see. You're quite the exception."

"Not really."

Leerin, afraid and had retreated into herself again, was piquing Minse's curiosity.

"But we've confirmed once more the purpose of rebuilding. She should also be concentrating on her study. The ministers have thought through it. But if you get her involved too much into the administration side of things, I hope you can at least make up your determination once each week before acting."

"You're already acting like a guardian."

"Am I, the guardian?"

"Well, even so."

"Don't worry. I've never thought of becoming the Queen."

"Humph."

Unable to comprehend the conversation, Leerin was comparing Minse and the Queen.

"Anyway, prepare her room."

"Ah, Leerin, I still have something to say with Minse. You can bring in the luggage."

"Yes."

Leerin nodded. Minse called over a maid and instructed her to prepare Leerin's room. Leerin's luggage should be waiting outside the house as the Queen had said.

The other maid went to prepare new tea after Leerin left.

"Then let's cut to the chase," Minse said, but the Queen was showing a bored expression.

"How come I feel my temper flaring when I'm seeing such a speculative face?"

Minse replied frankly. "Never mind."

Alsheyra's expression changed. In here was the face of the Queen, of someone who stood at the top of Grendan's governance. One couldn't question that this was the figure of a victorious Queen who was the most powerful Military Artist and had control of all Heaven's Blade successors.

"Leerin also has the right to succeed the royal throne."

"You mean the royal grandson. But we haven't announced it."

"Yes. He doesn't want to die yet. Uh, he hasn't planned on dying even now."

"Then is this done to protect Leerin?"

"Could be. She's not a Military Artist. The rule of the three royal families is that a non-Military Artist cannot succeed the throne, but there is no such rule set for the right to becoming a successor."

"Till now, the person used to being the head of the royal family will become the next successor. Of course he'll be the one. This has already been set down by the rule."

"Well, because of that, there's no problem to work on what doesn't have a rule. The rule."

"And also, the feeling?"

"That's right. Anyway, it's your habit to speak on the good side. Since Tigris died, Claribel..... She's left home."

"That can't be helped. It's her personality."

Perhaps this might bring in other trouble.

"The problem is perhaps they're used to breaking the rules and so are complaining about it."

"Yes. That must be it."

"The problem of the inheritor to the Ronsmier family isn't resolved. Perhaps that's the reason for the argument."

"And I had to get involved."

This meant the ministers were protecting themselves. It might be one of their strategies for allowing Leerin to come in touch with the governance of Grendan. Of course she had to show humility in the arena of social interaction and her ability to govern. Even so, people may get jealous of her for suddenly being raised to a high

position. Things hadn't changed from the past till the present. Even Minse still held the same feeling to Layfon.

Anyway…... about that. It seemed the Queen hadn't put in her best effort to debate her case.

"Anyway, give an example of those who are complaining."

"And this is about her defense. She left it all to Kanaris, perhaps it's about....."

"So the Rivanes, a branch of the royal family, the one she's dealing with, are a bunch of royalists, right? They might revolt if circumstances permit."

Mutiny. Conscious of her utterance, Minse shivered internally. This was on the day before Delbone's death. He had been considering it after meeting her while she was still alive. She had felt that it had become reality. She wouldn't have to worry about mutiny if the current successor's power of Psychokinesis was absolute.

"..... It's good that nothing has happened."

The economic blow to Grendan was more severe than the loss of lives. The destroyed buildings weren't rebuilt for free. And debris couldn't be reused. Resources were limited. A moving city, Regios, couldn't immediately transform and use any resources that had been collected, and so the reduction of resources in reserve was a severe problem.

Though Minse had reduced his own discomfort as he continued to converse with the Queen, he only felt more disturbed the more they talked.

Layfon was invited to dinner after the two of them finished work.

"..... Why there?"

They had entered a coffee shop, a shop he was very familiar with. And the menu. But this amount of food shouldn't be enough to fill his classmate's appetite.

"Don't you know that they've added big dishes to the menu here recently?"

"Really?"

He wasn't asking his classmate. He was asking the waitress standing at their table – Meishen.

"Uh. Yeah."

Meishen spread out the menu before him, her other hand holding a tray of cups.

"The shop owner has started a so-called 'Plan to aid the regeneration of the city'."

"Uh."

There really was a picture introducing big dishes. He looked around and saw many customers eating the same thing, their dishes fully filled. It used to have more female customers, but now it had attracted male customers too.

"Because this is only limited to dinner, and the plan is about to finish."

"So gotta eat before it ends."

"Delong-kun comes often."

"I see."

His classmate had more confidence after listening to Meishen. Meishen was called back to the kitchen after she took their orders. Layfon spread out the leaflet on the table. He was given it on the way to the shop.

"Anything good?"

"Um, everywhere else is very expensive."

"Of course it's expensive compared to the male Dormitory One."

Dormitory One for males and females had reduced its rent for new students with housing problems because of their lack of money. And some students had to give up their rooms for the new arrivals. Some of them didn't want to move out.

This decision was made by drawing lots according to a student's saving and marks (after taking into account of unusual circumstances). There were people who could stay till graduation in the Dormitory One, and there were those who were kicked out just after their first year. And Layfon was one of the less fortunate. The lot decided he had to leave.

"But it shouldn't be a problem with the money you get from cleaning the Mechanical Department?"

"But....."

He had already negotiated, but the rent was still high.

Any places close to the school, commercial streets and tram stations had high rent. And the most important thing was there weren't many empty lots left. Most were taken by the seniors first, and then those juniors who managed to get a space through connections. Layfon's classmate was one of them. The other students also got a room the same way. And so Layfon, not good at social interaction, had to run around to find a living place. Though there were newly-built dormitories, in the end, he had failed to get anything. The effects of the previous crisis were still evident. Living in a dormitory with no other human presence, Layfon had no choice but to find a better house for himself.

"You're active in the platoon. Shouldn't you have lots of money from the reward? You could just use it."

His classmate was referring to the high level building. Its appearance was very familiar to everyone. It wasn't the same as those rent-free buildings. It was prepared for the very rich or thriftiest student in the Academy City.

Layfon shook his head silently as he looked at the price of rent on the leaflet. It wasn't a problem for Karian to live there as a successful Student President with lots of money from his family, but this wasn't the same with Layfon.

"I've used up my savings."

"There should be a way, as you're in a platoon. The intercity competition was intense right?"

"Yeah."

There was only one war between cities after leaving Grendan. This was what everyone called the intercity Military Arts Competition.

The battle for a selenium mine that was the source of a city's fuel ended with Zuellni as the victor.

But Layfon didn't think it was because of his efforts alone. Besides, the most important question was "Should I still stay in a platoon?"

He hadn't contacted other cities after that. About not having contact, the Student Council made such judgment according to the principles set by experience.

The results of the three intercity competitions were two wins and one loss. Zuellni had avoided the risk of losing all of its selenium mines. Layfon, whom Karian had placed in Military Arts program, was no longer needed. In that case, his mission as a platoon member or a Military Artist had ended. Anyone would have arrived at this conclusion. This wasn't related to Karian's concern that the feeling of sometimes being attracted by the type of people like Nina wasn't so bad. All Layfon felt was he had no strength left after the intercity Military Arts Competition had finished.

"Ah, now it's quiet."

The building that suddenly appeared before him piqued Layfon's interest. The room decoration and the width and length of it differed from other buildings. It wasn't made for one person only. Layfon was deeply attracted to the spacious living space.

"Ah, wait. Wait. That won't work. It's close to the cargo area and is far away from the school. There isn't any commercial street near, but then it does have empty lots."

His classmate was right. Cargo areas took up a large chunk of the areas in the map. What was left was an unknown manufacturing area. Not that there weren't any residential buildings, but there probably weren't as many students here.

"But it doesn't matter how far away the commercial street is as long as I can see the captain."

He could buy the necessities after school. Layfon wasn't that interested in entertainment-related facilities. Not that he would want to go to such a place by himself.

"Perhaps. Contact you later."

"Really?"

His classmate lifted his head to watch the sky for some reason.

Meishen arrived with the dishes. Layfon took up the spoon and began eating as his classmate explained. His gaze hadn't changed direction. He was still looking at the building.

Just like a ray of the sun was filtering through the heavy cloud layers. This was the feeling he got.

After that, his classmate began to talk with him openly. They contacted the owner of the building according to the method printed on the leaflet, set a time for a meeting and then finally signed the contract.

It was easier for Layfon to move around, as he was a member of the seventeenth platoon.

The classmate who was leading him around the place had high spirits from the start to finish.

"Really, two of you deciding to rent here. Such good fortune. Take me there. That was what the senpai said to me."

"Two?"

"Yes. No one has lived here before. Because of its bad location. Anyway, it's old. I said so already yesterday. This building has all the essential facilities. Cleaning is provided, but because the building is so old, there might be unexpected things."

"Ah....."

"The most popular dormitory is the girls dorm in the self-study area of the Engineering subject. It's the best of the best in its appearance and interior design. Anyone would have been attracted by that building. As for here, there's nothing else to look at except cheap rent and lots of space."

The senpai sighed.

"Though I've only been managing this place for two years, there's finally new people coming. And two as well."

"Ah."

He probably didn't like looking after this building. Layfon didn't want to think much as he watched the happy senpai.

He looked around. Dust filled the room. Sunlight filtered through the window to shine on the empty house. It seemed to be bringing something to him.

If he had to avoid something.....

"....."

"It's hard to answer."

"Then when can I move over?"

"Well, I've to start planning cleaning up the house, and I need one more day to follow up. Probably one week will do."

"Then I'll move in after one week's time."

"Ok. Give me the key for now. I'll contact you if there're any changes."

"All right."

The old key was like the past.

But this wasn't related to whether the key was old or new. He could only think that it was a new key to him.

Only this situation was broadcasted all around her.

Nina controlled her annoyance. She couldn't retreat in this situation. The annoyance in her was like smoke, rising and invading her nostrils.

The empty space of the self-study area of the Engineering subject, the space where new dormitories once stood and were then torn down, had become Nina's best training ground. Students were in self-study mode during the regenerating period, and so Nina had a good chance to train, putting her accumulated experience into practice. No one could disturb her.

"Ahh, what's happening?"

Claribel was provoking her, but Nina kept practicing.

This tension-filled situation was created deliberately.

Layfon had used that technique and he had used his clones to attack Gorneo during the inter-platoon match. She knew the difference between those two moves. The former was to create an opportunity whereas the latter was to attack.

Then what was this?

Countless Claribels were moving around her. All of them were illusions, as of blurry shadows reflected on the surface of the water .

But the presence was changing constantly.

A clue had appeared in a place empty of things.

The truth was the place itself was confusing her. Nina had hidden herself so she could ambush Claribel. Claribel's words and the unbearable circumstance were all made to provoke her.

Annoyance remained with her even though she knew it was a provocation.

"This is Karen Kei."

Claribel had been instructing her at the beginning of practice. " Control the amount of your Kei and let it change through different limbs and joints, so that your opponent cannot anticipate your next move. Fight without regularity. My teacher wants me to destroy in a more efficient manner, but I'm not up to his level yet. Besides, I'm still not used to that state of mind."

Nina was interested in what it was like to destroy efficiently. Right now, she was confusing her opponent with Karen Kei and not moving her body an inch.

Gorneo was also using Karen Kei, the same as Shante who had been copying his moves. But he had added combat skills on top of it. Nina still wasn't sure of what it meant that he was basically just using Karen Kei.

Claribel wasn't holding the strange weapon – the weapon that she named as Kochouenshiken (Flaming Butterfly Sword). She was only fighting Nina with Karen Kei.

She never had to think about her opponent much, because the injured would be lying on the ground if she were to hammer with the iron whips. As for now, she didn't know where she should hit, as her opponent was evading her – this was her first time meeting such an opponent.

But Nina didn't move. Maybe she didn't move because she didn't know where the blows were coming or maybe because she kept immobile so she could see through Claribel's technique. Claribel's clones surrounded her, but only her presence was flowing. Her actual body had not moved.

The key of a battle between Military Artists was speed. The style of Karen Kei was a waste of time, meaningless. She should be thinking of strategies to aid her fight while her opponent was confused. But Claribel didn't do that. As for Nina, she was doing the expected, thinking of close quarters fighting and how to break through the technique of Karen Kei.

Was she thinking of this because of the training? Or would she have thought of it in a real battle too? In that case, she felt that her spirit was in danger in this battle against Claribel.

Control her worries and calmly observe her opponent. Claribel shouldn't be using Sakkei. Sakkei would be flowing out of her body as she used it. This meant she couldn't be using it. The numerous presences were used to hide Claribel's real self. Now Nina needed to find the real body from the illusory clones.

"If you don't attack, I'll begin."

The words were bounced to her from the half destroyed buildings around them. Nina couldn't tell where Claribel was hiding.

What to do?

Nina wasn't trained enough to be able to tell apart the flow of Kei. She couldn't do it with her level of skill. And so what should she do?

She had decided to stand still. But.....

"Ok. Everyone, stop."

It was an unfamiliar voice. The tip of a blade was already on her back at where her heart was when Nina realized it.

"Ah," she moaned. The muscles of her back felt like they were dead. The feeling of the tip of the blade was different from Claribel's real body. It was a quick sense of intense pressure.

"You almost failed to control it."

"Ah...."

Nina sat down, exhausted, as Claribel replied. Claribel returned the weapon to its Dite form and sat down too.

"You can control it now. That's improvement."

Nina looked at her. She must be comforting her. Claribel had followed Layfon from Grendan and settled down in Zuellni as a new student of the coming year. She was still wearing her old clothes but she seemed happy. It took her a short period of time to adapt to life here. She had gone to find part time work after Nina helped her finish the procedures for entering the dormitory.

And so she was now training with Nina.

Claribel's expression was carefree.

"Sorry. I still have to train."

"Of course. I've to train a lot too. I'll also improve by looking at how you move."

"Oh, what would you have done if it was you?"

"Yes. I'm not sure. I'd have destroyed everything around me and used external Kei to take away all interference. And I wouldn't have given my opponent any chances."

"What if you can't destroy it?"

"Then I can take hold whatever opportunity that presents to me. If I feel that I can't win, then I'll have to concentrate on gaining time, and step into the opponent's trap. Isn't that more meaningful ?"

Nina could discern Claribel's personality from her words.

"I want Layfon to participate in this training too," she muttered. It was regretful, but it would have been fun.

Layfon lacked the air of a Military Artist since he returned from Grendan. He was originally very ordinary. Now he even lacked his shine in battles. He didn't come to the platoon training. Even Nina saw that his skill was lacking luster in the last intercity Military Arts Competition.

Claribel knew all these and so she had applied to train with him in order to help him pick himself up. But it was all in vain. Now she had nothing to say to Layfon.

"We must find a way."

Nina felt that Claribel's reason for coming to Zuellni was Layfon. Claribel's expression contained a bit of anger at the current Layfon. Both of them failed to keep calm when facing this situation .

"But what should we do about the distance between us?"

Layfon still hadn't come to platoon training. Of course they were naturally growing apart. Shouldn't we have removed all roadblocks to get closer? But it wasn't possible for Nina. As a member of the 17th platoon, she understood why he felt so down.

Layfon had chosen to live an ordinary Academic life, but he was facing difficulties. Time still flowed even though Nina couldn't see him.

Layfon already had one year of experience at the Mechanical Department. He was able to make sound judgments and so didn't have to pair up with her anymore. He was an excellent Military Artist. Nina felt that he wanted to work alone.

All Military Arts students thought that they could relax after the intercity Military Arts Competition. The platoon training days and the cleaning of the Training Complex were days of the past. And the relationship between Sharnid and Felli were naturally becoming less and less harmonious.

Even Nina felt that the 17th platoon might be disbanded.

What should she do? She had no idea. There were many factors to consider, but it wasn't possible for her alone to make it into reality. Sadness and loneliness cut deep into her.

"You can only be strong."

Did Claribel say this because of her personality or that she still didn't understand? Nina didn't know.

The person looking for a good book to read saw through the window that Layfon was walking with a lot of luggage.

Felli put down the book and followed.

"Layfon," she called.

He turned around in surprise.

"Felli?"

"What're you doing?"

He didn't look to be shopping. It seemed he was moving his luggage to somewhere.

"I'm moving my things."

"Oh."

An ominous feeling flashed through her.

"I'm moving and taking the things I don't need to the rubbish collector."

"Uh....."

She heard of his reason as they walked together.

"So have you decided to move to the dormitory that far away?"

Felli was surprised that he was moving to the cargo area. She was strongly against his choice because that place was very far away from the school. She vaguely remembered that place as she had walked past it when she went to play somewhere after school.

"But it's still close to the station."

That wasn't assuring.

"You could have picked a better house."

She could imagine the rent of his house judging by the money and reward money given to her by the 17th platoon. She hadn't needed to find a new home, as she didn't have to move. But it wouldn't be difficult to find a place with better conditions if she were to find one right away.

"Yeah."

A strange smile appeared on his face.

They had arrived at the rubbish collector. The things Layfon took with him weren't worth a penny, but he wasn't frustrated. He happily transferred the money into his card and looked one more time at the things he were to sell.

This should be a busy time for the rubbish collecting point. The things that the graduates didn't need were lined up in rows. The assortment of domestic things weren't likeable because they were brought for the convenience of travel. It would take lots of effort to take apart or transfer those things.

Layfon stopped at a corner of the bed.

"The bed?"

"The old bed belongs to the dormitory, so I have to buy a new one."

"I see..."

"The place is really big, and I guess I'm the only person living in it. Might as well buy a bigger bed."

"Why are you living in such a big house?"

Felli guessed he would say because it was cheap. Was this due to his being raised in an orphanage? Or that he was affected by the poverty he experienced in the food shortage crisis? Anyway, he was a thrifty and easy person.

"I've always wanted a big house."

His answer was unexpected, but it wasn't surprising. He was happy that he could use the space that was meant for two. A spacious house must be very appealing. Felli had been living in a big house all her life. Even though she was able to understand a bit of his feeling, she probably couldn't understand the inconvenience brought by a small living space. Layfon seemed to really like this bed. The corner of his lips hadn't stopped smiling as he praised the bed, caressing the mattress with his hand.

"If a large room is good, would you come to my room?"

"Eh?"

After saying so, she realized she just said something ridiculous.

But, it wouldn't stop.

"My brother's room will be left behind once he graduates. That's why I haven't given any thought to moving. I have not received instructions from my brother or from home to move. What do you say?"

"Iya, even if you say that….."

Seeing Layfon's confused face, Felli desperately tried not to let her cheeks become red. If it's like this, there's no choice but to act obtuse. Even if Felli feel that she failed, she didn't think that her proposal was bad, so she could not bring herself to withdraw.

"Iya, but that's a little difficult."

"Mu….."

Seeing Layfon's cheeks get red, Felli taunted Layfon in the back of her mind for having good intuition only at times like this.

After deciding what to buy and telling the delivery location, the two walked back to their own rooms. Thinking that they would no longer share the same return path, Felli felt a sadness in her chest.

"Oh yeah, you received something from Delbone-san, right?"

Layfon suddenly said while they silently walked without talking.

"Y, yes. I still haven't analyzed it."

The information from data converted from the battle experience she received from the Heaven’s Blade successor, Psychokinesist Delbone still could not be accessed. Even though Psychokinesist users were used to treating their own brains like a calculator, because of the transfer of a difficult thing like digitized experience, or perhaps because it was the first encounter with something like it , she just followed intuition for the current situation.

"Delbone-sama is very lucky."

"Is that so."

Felli could not speculate the meaning of Layfon's words. However, Felli had heard the woman's words on the verge of death. She did not think it a lie.

"It’s unthinkable that even Tigris-san died too."

"The grandfather of that person who came to Zuellni, correct?"

"Yes. I wonder what Claribel wants to do from now on. I'm sure her family is in a dilemma."

"But she doesn’t seem to worry too much about it."

"Ah."

"Death is definitely a possibility on the battlefield. She said those kinds of words before."

"Just like Tigris-san's style, huh?"

Layfon spoke to himself, looking into the distance.

"They were both so old, but even so I didn't think they would die like this."

Though the impact of death could be felt anytime, the turbulent chaotic situation had been too busy to be immersed in grief. Now, Layfon finally might be able to accept their deaths.

"Tigris-sama brought me a lot of sweets when I was little. Delbone-sama would often talk with my siblings with her flake. The two of them were good people."

"Ah."

Felli watched the Layfon's little sister, whom she met at Grendan, waving her hand at Delbone's flake.

"However, whether you're a good person or a bad person makes no difference on the battlefield."

Felli couldn't say anything in front of that cold reality.

"What should I do…"

To that, Felli could not think of anything to say, and could only remain silent.

Not knowing how many more opportunities they would have like this, but with Layfon immersed in grief, Felli endured her uncontrollable anger, and did not open her mouth to say a word until they reached the place where they parted.

The talk reached the point of there being nothing left to say.

Those who could be trusted, those who couldn't, the undistinguishable, listing them out was almost the entirety of the task. After that was just to build an escort for that girl.

"For now, let them protect Leerin from the shadows in turns. That is the most effective way."

"Even if that's true, how should I say it?"

Among those three classifications, the most important existences were the Heaven's Blade successors.

"The ones we can completely trust are Lintence, Reverse, and Cauntia. These are the only ones your majesty picked up from the outside."

"Though the others have some various differences, they're all involved in big military families. Kalvan and the others also stress regulations, so they should be the biggest rivals."

Elsmau was another faction that had been outside Grendan until a few days ago, but she originally had blood ties with Delbone, and because of the construction of the new information network using many Psychokinesists, she was too busy to be called upon. There were many people participating, and unlike the conventional methods, it was no longer a single person presiding over the handling of information.

Not only could it avoid the danger of one person running away, but it also guaranteed a sound organization. However, seemed like it wouldn't come in handy for this situation.

"Lin doesn't seem like he has energy for this kind of thing. We can't give bodyguard duty or the like to Cauntia, so that only leaves Reverse."

"To request only him to guard a girl, it seems like I'm not qualified to do that job."

Cauntia was very jealous, and Minse trembled thinking about the scene of himself being slaughtered.

"I wouldn’t want to do it if that were possible. If I request that of him, it’s like I’m playing a game of chess, using one of my available pieces. Ah well, I don’t have the heart to change the status quo, and it’s not like I can’t think about changing the system ."

"I also look for the usable among my subordinates."

Approving of Minse's words, Alsheyra laid on the sofa's backrest, looking up at the ceiling.

"If only they came to assassinate me."

"Is that sarcasm.....?"

He glared at her thin neck.

"No way. That way of doing things is very quick and neat, isn’t it?"

Once, Minse had thought of assassinating the Queen.

"Yes, but I fear that this time, something like that won't happen. Without your majesty, we have no way of defeating our enemies. You are a kind of deterrent, even if the rebels run wild they cannot surpass you."

".....But we still need her, huh."

"That’s something that others cannot grasp."

"So annoying. Even though it's something related to our life, we still can't understand it."

"Even if many people expect a hero or a protagonist from a story, they won't believe that such a person actually exists in their surroundings. No one wants their life to be held in someone else's hands."

"But, the troublesome things are pushed onto other people."

"So true. Let's stop the silly talk here. So, what should we do next? Our movements are unclear. Rather, we don't even know if we should move. Has Reverse been added to the escort team?"

"In the end, we can only request of him to play along."

"Then, would you please do so."

After confirming the talk was over, Minse asked for tea and sweets to relieve his mind's exhaustion. Leerin had unpacked the luggage that she had transported over, and inquired of a maid walking by about where to put it. The others were finished, but had not received instructions, so Minse told them to do whatever they wanted with a confused face. It was one thing to let someone become aware all at once of a change in position and lifestyle, but Minse thought that slowly becoming accustomed little by little was a necessary step.

While the maid prepared new tea, Alsheyra clapped her hands.

"I thought of something good."

Upon seeing her face, Minse didn't think it would be anything good.

"What is it?"

"Kanaris or Barmelin, who's better?"

"In what aspect?"

He thought to himself that it was as expected, but he pretended to not have discerned it. The maid perked her ears while also pretending not to know.

"Your marriage partner. You can't choose no one, so why don't you make the choice?"

With that, the topic turned to Minse's side, but since others were around, he couldn't say it.

"My house hasn't even been repaired, so I can't think of marriage now."

Because of his brother Herder's elopement and disappearance, the Eutnohl house had suffered a great loss. Because of the family situation, relatives of the Eutnohl had kept their distance, and focused on strengthening the power of the royal offshoot Military Artist Rivanes family.

Frankly, among the three royal families, house Eutnohl was the poorest.

The task in front of Minse was to revive the house. Actually, he was also involved in the use of a few roaming buses that conducted information trading.

"So, wouldn't it be nice to marry Kanaris? "

"......It's not that easy."

"You don't want to rely on your bride's connections and financials? Then pick Barmelin. She's not from some elite Military Artist family, and her parent's strength and status are pretty distant to the point of where they wonder how they produced her, and she's not part of any faction."

Behind Minse was his wet nurse, making a gesture as if to say " say more say more". Minse made an unpleasant expression.

"I haven't thought of it."

"Aiya, it's the obligation of the three royal families to produce even more excellent Military Artists."

"If that's the case, you should begin first. Aren't you older than me?"

"But you'll definitely become old first."

Cleverly countered, Minse breathed out a long sigh.

After parting with Felli and returning to the dorm, Layfon was surprised to feel that the room had become more spacious.

One room had used the two-person room. He had felt happy that the room was so spacious, but somehow after placing his things he had felt it was no longer as spacious. Originally, the room's furniture had been prepared beforehand, so he hadn't really thought of buying anything.

However, he had been here for almost a year. When the sixth-years left, Layfon would change from a first-year into a second-year.

He didn't feel like he had accomplished anything or that he could accomplish anything. The time had flowed. Things had changed. The Layfon who had just moved in here could no longer be seen.

Layfon didn't know how to handle the inexpressible feeling passing through in his chest. He had been abandoned by Leerin, but even though he was sad, his heart wasn't heavy. Time flied. And even if one did nothing at all, he could grasp hold of the strength to stand back up.

If one couldn't stand up then there was only death. On the battlefield, wavering at seeing someone close die in front of you

would weigh you down. Layfon didn't know how many times he had seen that kind of scene. Though the situations were different, after seeing that kind of scene many times, Layfon had stood up. He had that kind of feeling.

He suddenly remembered.

About the time Claribel challenged him to a duel upon his return to Zuellni. Though she said it would just be practice, he felt that she took it as the real thing. Or maybe she would fight seriously even if it were practice, it could be her style.

Perhaps that was the manner of thinking of one who was accustomed to the battlefield.

Though she was helpless to follow the Academy City's safety guidelines and protective equipment that covered her Kochouenshiken (Flaming Butterfly Sword), she soon got used to it , and then fought Layfon.

The result was Layfon's defeat.

There was nothing to say about it. Those who understood Layfon, regardless of strength, would be clear that he would be defeated.

"What?"

A surprised Claribel asked.

"You aren't that kind of person, right?"

Having forcefully brought him to this secluded place on the city outskirts, in the mostly undisturbed atmosphere, with her face almost devoid of sweat, Claribel glared at Layfon who had fallen down on his bottom after she got over her surprise.

"I didn't come to Zuellni to see you like this."

Claribel's words were sharp and merciless. Layfon only remained silent. The Sapphire Dite had fallen by his side, and Layfon averted his gaze, not daring to even look at the cold light that it gave out.

"I don't know what turned you into this."

She didn't know Leerin. It was unclear whether she knew Leerin now, but at the time she had not known her.

"Anyone would think you shameful if they saw you now."

"....."

"I think so."

"....."

"Aside from being able to see many different things after leaving home, I always thought I had to do this. In order to keep my back straight in front of that man, I had to do this."

"....."

"That's the reason that I came here."

Perhaps because Layfon didn't make any response, Claribel became irritated, and walked away.

"I..... don't want to see you like this."

"....."

"But, it's just my selfish thinking."

A voice lowing in volume reached Layfon's ears as though melting into the air, and then Claribel's lilting voice disappeared in an instant.

.....In order to keep my back straight in front of that man.

That must be Tigris. She had come to Zuellni first in order to keep from shaming her great grandfather, and secondly because there were more important things than succeeding her house. That was defeating Layfon. Then, it was to become a Heaven's Blade successor. If it were only to train, then it would be much better to go to Grendan where strength gathered.

He couldn't understand. Even though he couldn't understand, she had indeed come here with a definite aim.

Even Layfon didn't think this should continue. He didn't want to let many people see his current slackened appearance. Of course they included his companions in Zuellni. There was also his father and those at the orphanage, and he also didn't want Lintence to see this.

.....He didn't want Leerin to see it either.

But, what should he do?

What would he stand up for, perhaps that was the real question . His original purpose for enrolling was to search for a new self, but that had changed because of Zuellni's situation, and he had become careless. Later due to some unknown changes, he had been pulled into the middle of a big commotion involving Grendan.

In a sense, Leerin had abandoned Layfon for the sake of letting him return to his original position. It could be interpreted that way . Thinking about Leerin made his chest hurt, because he protested against Leerin's ideas, but had no other ideas of his own. If this were reality, if only he could completely return. He couldn't even clearly form his own feelings towards Leerin.

When he became aware of this situation, things had already been destroyed.

He really didn't understand.

Once again, Layfon had become unsure of his feelings.

It was this kind of feeling again, and he didn't know what was a good thing to do.

He hadn't really changed since the time he entered school.

Could he ignore the changes in front of him and continue walking?

Thinking of that, Layfon felt his chest hurt.

He threw his body onto the bed and rolled around. His excitement of obtaining a new room was quickly blown away. Even if he abandoned everything, collapsed on the bed, he still couldn't act as if nothing had happened.

His thoughts were running wild, like a torrent, and something was screaming. Then, Layfon blocked his ears, and closed his eyes.

In a new place that welcomed the night, it was very quiet. She wore a nightgown from the many types of clothes that Alsheyra had bought for her, looking out from the window that was large enough to suit the palace. On the other side was a balcony, but she didn't feel like going out, only looking out from inside.

She could see the Eutnohl house's garden and the skyline of Grendan.

If one's location changed, the scenery of the city also changed. This was something that she learned after she entered the school dormitory. It had only been one year. No, it wasn't even a year yet, but it would be soon, so calling it one year wouldn't be a problem.

In that one year, she never thought the landscape she could see again would have already changed.

No, it could be said that this year had a constantly changing landscape. After entering school, up until her leave of absence, and then leaving for Zuellni. The things she had seen on her journey, and the events that had happened in Zuellni. Though she hadn't thought she would decide to return to Grendan so quickly.

She hadn't thought that not only would the scenery change, but she herself would also change.

Leerin softly touched the eyepatch covering her right eye.

Saya had once again returned to the inner sanctuary. She had said that, though she didn't know whether she would be able to sleep, she had no choice but to stay in the palace. Even though Leerin wished for Saya to teach her more things, she didn't know after all what she wanted her to teach, and had no way to retain her.

Right now she was Leerin Eutnohl. She could confirm this as reality from the scenery outside and by turning her head to look back at the big room. This was the conclusion. In her heart she had already decided not to make those insignificant confirmations, so she observed the room. Even though it was for a single person, the bed was cleverly separated from the rest of the space. If this were the orphanage, this space would be enough for everyone to sleep in.

Thinking here, the night would quickly be over.

"......Oh well, get used to it already, Leerin."

She said to herself.

There were many things. Her reality was missing. Reality had changed. Right now she was Leerin Eutnohl.

She had to get used to many things.

"Well, before I sleep, I should write some of the report."

She had submitted a notice of reentry to her school in Grendan. Unfortunately, during the chaotic situation, Leerin had no time to receive her scholarship certificate from Zuellni. However, due to the Queen, she could be admitted as a second-year in Grendan after she finished her report.

First, she must return to a normal life.

Her normal life as Leerin Eutnohl.

Life was not all excitement.

Chapter 2: The Impassioned One

Samiraya Mirke burned. She was staring at the poster with burning passion. She was in it. On the poster was also her name. Though her supporters came, hoping to see her smile, she was showing them a severe expression.

It might feel like boasting to others, but she felt the atmosphere to be more grand and just. Not that she wanted to become an idol. She knew she wasn't cut out for that. And so she wanted to convey her passion through her expression.

Samiraya wanted to become the next Student President.

She would be in grade 5 next year. She had been working in the Student Council for the past year, and she had accumulated a certain amount of experience. She had always been looking at Karian, the current Student President who was about to leave his role.

Samiraya was a person with no good points except for her seriousness, and so she was the class prefect and she sometimes went to help out in the Student Council. She didn't plan to be here. It was all done without deliberation, and somehow, she ended up here.

But now Samiraya's heart was boiling, and her wish to become the Student President was becoming more and more intense.

"How is it?" and so she asked herself full of confidence.

One part of the dormitory had been turned into her conference room as a Student President candidate. All her strategic meetings would be held here.

"Um, not so sure."

Beneath her glasses was the listless face of Leu Matthew, whose gaze fell to the piece of paper on the clipboard in his hand. The conference room could hold ten people but now there were only Samiraya and Leu in it. Samiraya was listening to the street survey result of a certain magazine from Leu. She knew the editor wasn't that good at what he did, but she was still concerned about the result.

And then what Leu said was of a disappointing result.

"Though the head organization is here, it doesn't look that much different."

Leu was one year younger than her, but their relationship had become very good since they met each other in the Class Council and found out that they were both from the same city.

"As I thought. People aren't interested in the election because of the administration side of things. Anyway, Sami is the last in the rankings when it comes to experience and public exposure."

Samiraya was already 20 years old, but she didn't look that much taller than Leu because of her height. But the most important thing was she was better than Leu when it came to being calm and steady. There were other supporters, but most of them were

related to the Student Council. Samiraya was too, that was why she was one of the candidates. No other supporters were present in this conference, not because of fairness, but because they were all too busy. In general, the most complicated things had been taken care of, but the jobs that were to come were piling up like mountains. The job for next year was crucial, but what was most important was the present.

If this attitude was held not just within the Student Council, then it was no wonder that no one was interested in the election.

"To enter the election in this situation, votes will naturally flow to the person with high public exposure," Leu sighed.

But Samiraya hadn't considered that point.

"That can't be true. Besides, we just need to increase our publicity from now."

"How?"

Leu picked up her spirit at Samiraya's optimism.

"If it's about publicity, then the best person should be a Military Artist."

Her lively reply was the signal of her actions.

"Uh? Leu. What is it?"

Samiraya and Leu had finally arrived at the classroom of the third year. Samiraya suddenly grabbed hold of Nina's hand, who was getting ready for class.

"Are you interested in the election?"

"Ha?"

Nina was in a fluster as she looked at Samiraya whose eyes were emitting light.

"Ah, well, you..... are a candidate for the Student President position."

Nina remembered the poster. There was only a face on the poster. Because the poster didn't show Samiraya's full body, Nina didn't realize she was this short.

"Samiraya Mirke. Please look after me. How about it? Help out in the election. The head position of the Military Arts program is waiting for you."

"You're the first person to say that to me directly for now," Nina said with a bitter smile.

"Ara, so have there been other people asking for the same?" Leu said.

Nina nodded.

"Two came. Um, how about we talk over it somewhere else."

She didn't feel comfortable when gazes from other students gathered on her.

"Sure."

But Samiraya didn't move.

"I want to relay my thoughts to everyone. That way, someone will tell me if there's something wrong with it. Now I want to tell everyone why I need Nina Antalk."

"No. That's enough," Nina shrugged and looked at Leu for help.

She could tell Samiraya's personality just by looking at her expression. But just what was that cold smile afterwards? Anyway, there didn't exist a student who would point out Samiraya's mistake. Nina found out from other candidates the reason why she became involved in the election, but she didn't understand. Because the 17th platoon became famous in this Military Arts Competition. Nina was in the third year and so was the center of the platoon that was mainly made up of juniors. Their rank in the platoon matches was third. She didn't feel much difference in the gap between her team, Gorneo's 5th platoon and Vance's 1st platoon. The 17th platoon acted as the infiltration team in the last Competition. The 17th platoon was the sign of new power.

Nina felt that this praise was similar to when Sharnid was in the 10th platoon. Perhaps it was the same. She felt honored to be on the receiving end of it. But that didn't mean she would allow herself to be taken advantage of just for the sake of the election.

"Sorry. Others have already said that I'm not mature enough. The job of the Military Arts Head is a bit too much for me."

"It's all right. Leu is in the same year as you. If I win, then she will become the Vice President."

"Ah? Really. I haven't heard of that," Leu was surprised.

"Uh? Have I not said this before? Karian didn't set a Vice President position, but I need it. If Leu isn't here to help out....."

Leu touched her own head. It felt strange, but it looked like Samiraya really did forget to say it to her. She was unexpectedly clumsy.

"Then let's do it together!"

Samiraya's smile was like a budding flower. Nina felt that that this smile suited her better than the forced solemn expression she had on the poster. Still, she shook her head.

"I'm really sorry. I have something I must do as a Military Artist . I really am not suited to becoming the Head of Military Arts."

"I see."

Samiraya let go of her hand. Nina felt guilty at her regretful expression.

"Uh, that can't be helped then." But Samiraya then looked at her with a smile. "But will you help out when I become the Student President, Captain?"

"Of course. Let me know anytime if the 17th platoon can help out in any way."

"Then goodbye. I'll turn Zuellni into a better city. Just you wait."

At her confident proclamation, for a split second, Nina felt that she saw the figure of Samiraya overlap with Zuellni.

"Well, this is hopeless. What should we do next?"

Samiraya Mirke didn't feel down. She talked with Leu as they walked in the corridor.

"It was my judgment to go find Nina."

To act when she thought of something was both Samiraya's strength and weakness. She would listen to others' opinions, but she liked to act before listening, especially this time.

Before, Leu had smiled at Nina, thinking that she had really acted like herself, but it seemed that she hadn't understood the meaning.

"The hardest person to understand is oneself", thought Leu as she involuntarily said it.

"I approve of finding a Military Artist to become a partner, but if it were me, I wouldn't have chosen Nina. Even if she is indeed very popular, if she actually was chosen as Military Arts Head it could evoke dislike from other people."

"Why?"

"She's too young, and since she's popular at the same time, there are people who dislike her. Nina especially gives people the impression of standing out too much, and more importantly when she formed the seventeenth platoon she aroused some disputes. There are definitely many people who see her as unsuitable."

Moreover we don't need two people who do things recklessly without using their brain, Leu thought in her heart but didn't say from her mouth.

"Mmm, that’s true, she's a bit difficult."

At Samiraya taking Nina's side and uttering laments, Leu was really a bit shocked. Putting aside ages for now, it was really naive if you looked at it, she could even become your rival. Leu thought this but did not say so, not because she didn't want to, but because even if she did it wouldn't be of much use.

"Since it's like this, who's good then?"

"As for whom, that hasn't already been decided."

At Leu's prompt, Samiraya thought about it for a bit, and reached an answer herself.

So, afterwards they once again squeezed into a class, arriving in a fifth-year classroom.

Gorneo was in the classroom by himself being depressed. That feeling made it hard for someone to approach. Leu felt that the entire classroom exuded a sort of tense atmosphere, and it was difficult for one to stay there.

"There, there's a bit of a hard-to-talk atmosphere."

Leu felt the tense atmosphere in front of the entrance, and didn't enter the classroom.

But-

"Why?"

Samiraya didn't notice, and as if she completely hadn't noticed the atmosphere, loudly called out, "Excuse me," and directly walked towards Gorneo.

With Gorneo, Samiraya seemed even smaller.

"What do you want?"

That low, bored voice was unable to sway Samiraya.

"It's our first time meeting. I'm the fourth-year Samiraya Mirke. Actually, I have something to request of you....."

"If it has something to do with the election, no way."

"Whats that, you already know why we were looking for you, that makes things easier to say."

"As I said, no way."

But Samiraya hadn't heard his words in the first place.

"If I become the Student Council President, I would like to invite you to become the Military Arts Head."

"Didn't you hear me, no way."

"But, other than Gorneo-senpai, who else is qualified to be the Military Arts Head?"

"That....."

"Gorneo-senpai is a fifth-year, as well as the captain of the fifth platoon, second in strength only to the Military Arts Head Vance's platoon. Whether it's strength as a Military Artist or leadership ability, there's no one better than senpai. I think it's only natural for you to be the Military Arts Head. Since it's like this, why do you refuse?"

It was different from the attitude she had when talking with Nina, not only her momentum, but her arguments also became more aggressive. It quite surprised Leu.

"For me, the higher my station, the worse I perform."

Hearing the remarks that he said to Samiraya, even Leu could understand but he still showed a difficult, pained expression. Could it be that he had some regrettable situation? Moreover, that it was only because of his situation that he was this irritable?

"If even Gorneo-senpai has no way to carry it out, then I can't insist . But even so, I still wish to become Student Council President. Because I have things I must fulfill. So I ask for your help," Samiraya said.

Leu felt that in Samiraya's simple words was a kind of incredible strength. Something that made one unable to refuse,

only permitting submission. More strength than even a thousand words.

Gorneo was a person who remained calm in whatever situations. This couldn't be felt from Nina, and actually even Samiraya thought that it wasn't possible for Nina to become the Military Arts Head.

Gorneo stopped his low groans, seeing his own statue-like, un-moving manner reflected in Samiraya's pure eyes, and Leu involuntarily sympathized with his expression.

But, with this kind of situation, Gorneo definitely was not on the list of any other Student Council President candidate. Moreover, since they had been refused by him, and so relied on Nina's ability, Samiraya was convinced.

Even if things were like this, if Gorneo were to promise here, then she would have great superiority when compared to the other candidates.

(Come on)

Leu also became unexpectedly enthusiastic.

"I don't have the time to think about those kind of questions right now." As Gorneo said these words, the bell signalling the start of class sounded simultaneously. That meant there was no time left.

Leu and Samiraya had no choice but to return to their classroom .

When teaching ended that meant that class was over. Leu walked over to Samiraya with a bit of worry, who was preparing to pack her things to leave.

"Well, let's go to Gorneo-senpai together."

At the same time, she indeed held some worry in her heart.

"Wait a bit."

Leu endured her headache, and directly grabbed Samiraya's collar and dragged her to the fifth-year classroom.

"What are you doing!"

"Calm down," Leu said, dragging Samiraya towards the conference room.

"Then, what is it?"

She obstinately made Samiraya sit on the simple chair. At this moment she seemed like an older person, and completely didn't look like someone who wanted to become the Student Council President.

"We've said we were going to convince him, but how should we go about convincing?"

"That, we have to be enthusiastic."

"You fool who doesn't use her brain."

"What?"

"Just enthusiasm won't produce any results."

"Then what else can we do?"

Even if her eyes were filled with hope, it still wasn't enough.

"Before plans, we have to gather intelligence. Even if we haven't even talked to Gorneo-senpai directly, we've head from Nina. Never would have thought he was such an ill-tempered person."

Even if he didn't seem very nice, she didn't think he would make the classroom's atmosphere such pandemonium.

Then, there must be some reason.

"First we need to understand the reason, and if we can do that then we can provide him with assistance. If we do that we'll get into his good graces, so then won't we create some good feelings in the other party?"

"Um, it sounds very cunning."

"Then, when the other party has difficulties, if we don't do anything, do you think they will say, 'ah, I have a bit of trouble~ could you help us~'? I think the other side's situation is favorable."

"You don't have to get mad."

"I'm mad. Because I did feel that I was being a bit cunning, but being told this directly, I can't help but get mad. However, if the other party has some trouble, helping them out isn't anything bad. "

"So then let's first gather intelligence."

The panicked Samiraya and the not-so-calm Leu began the operation like this.

At this time, someone entered the room,

"Sorry to disturb, are you busy?"

The person who entered was the current Student Council secretary, called Serine.

"Ah, Serine."

"This is from the President."

Serine took out a cake box.

"Wow, that's generous, is this okay?"

"There's no problem, the other candidates also have it."

"Alright, let me get you a cup of tea."

Leu walked out of the room to boil water. Serine was the current Student Council Secretary, and was already a fifth-year, who would remain in Zuellni next year. In addition, she was also a supporter of Samiraya.

"Ah, if only that were true."

When Leu returned, Serine said this.

It seemed that while she was out of the room boiling water, Samiraya had already carried out an explanation of the situation.

"Because of the battle last time, the vice-captain Shante was hospitalized, and has not left the hospital yet."

The previous commotion had injured many people. Most of them had recovered and been released from the hospital, but there were still unconscious students, and there were still students who had to go to the hospital. Leu had heard a male Military Artist that she recognized saying that it had really been a tragic battlefield. He had also been injured, but had been released from the hospital without injury. Even so, he would sometimes unintentionally express his detached thoughts.

During the commotion, his Military Artist heart had suffered a severe blow.

"Then, he cares so much about that person named Shante that it made his temper become so poor?"

"Could be. I'm not too clear on their individual situations, but in the end the relationship between the two is very good."

Serine's words earned a nod from Samiraya.

"Then, for Shante's rehabilitation, we'll go together to provide assistance."

Leu also thought that there was no other way.

"But there's a possibility that we won't make it for the election period."

Serine was calmer than Leu, and she who was under Karian's command and directly participated in Student Council matters had the steady calm that Leu and Samiraya did not.

"Of course, if he could become a joint candidate for the Student Council, that point alone is very superior. In the list of Student Council candidates, some Student Council President candidates have perfect social skills and connections. If his name is not with any of their names, if that's the case, then it's worth a look."

"But, do we have time?"

"Right, time is of the essence. Moreover the polling is next month. The other candidates have already recommended their own Military Arts Head candidates."

She had to find and decide on candidates for the other branches. She also could not go without preparing a draft for her speech. The things she had to do were plenty.

But, to other people, the significance of the 'Military Arts Head candidate' was definitely a more important place than the candidates for other branches.

It was expected that for most students, for most people, they very much cared about who the Military Arts Head was. As the person who would have to protect them, the one who stood there had a symbolic force.

"But if Gorneo-senpai loses.....?"

"Also, the seventeenth platoon's Nina Antalk had more popularity."

"No, we've already been refused."

"It could be that she's not good for it. Still, after that is the fourteenth platoon's Shin Kaihan, and the third platoon's Winse Karald."

As she listed these names, Serine showed a subtle expression. In terms of strength, the 17th Platoon and the 14th Platoon's Shin Kaihan were the same. But among the platoons that she had observed, he had a bit of frivolousness. The captains of all of the platoons from before Nina had also heard of this, and their frivolous impression of him was a negative element.

In this regard, Shin and Winse were complete opposites. Nina and the current Military Arts Head Vance had characters that were rather similar. But Winse gave people an unyielding feeling. An oppressive unyielding feeling like Vance and Gorneo was okay, but it seemed that his oppressive feeling was almost focused on neuroticism. If would be fine if he were only the captain of a small platoon, but to command the entire body of Military Artists, one needed to have a bit of flexibility.

She had said too much. She knew. However, from those who had actually achieved records, produced a sense of trust, had flexibility in moving a team, and who had a calming appearance, and who was able to stand by Samiraya while she was Student Council President as the Military Arts Head, there was no one more excellent than Gorneo.

"Ah, you're missing someone."

Seeing Samiraya and Leu, Serine continued speaking.

"Who?"

"Layfon Alseif."

She was already taking this as a joke.

Saying something that frightening, she must definitely be joking . But she was unaware of the effects of her own joke, as she enjoyed tea and cake. She left on her job, returning to the Student Council room.

"What does everyone think about what Serine's opinion just now?"

For now first put the question of the Military Arts Head to the side, and begin sorting out the other personnel candidates, Samiraya said.

Leu had a sort of a bad premonition. However you looked at it, Samiraya was the most important. Thinking to here, Leu said a strange sentence, "Okay, it's decided," and then began to depart.

"Who knows? I don't think he will approve."

In her mind had emerged Layfon Alseif.

The new first-year who had joined Nina's platoon with a preeminent strength, who most likely surpassed the Military Arts Head Vance. Nina's expression toward him was a "so powerful" evaluation. Her Military Artist friends also praised his "awesome" strength. She didn't really understand the professional reviews, but for the most part those words should be the case.

Ordinary students could only confirm the strength of Military Artists there, but even watching the inter-platoon battles Leu again sighed, "powerful".

What this entailed was that the Military Artist Layfon was extremely powerful.

Before the battle with Falnir, she had never heard anything of him like training for the match in the stadium.

Perhaps it was true that Nina led him in popularity, and this part she reckoned was something he disliked. But in Military Arts strength, he definitely would defeat the opponent. It was definitely the case that, regardless of good or bad, the foundation of Military Arts was strength.

The people who used their strength in his birthplace Grendan definitely thought this way.

But then, she thought that this alone wasn't enough, as expected . She only knew that for an ordinary person, this was very amazing .

"Hmm, yeah."

Unexpectedly, Samiraya also thought so.

"Sami, have you met Layfon?"

"Mmm..."

Towards Leu's surprised expression, Samiraya nodded her head .

"But not from the beginning."

Samiraya muttered as she looked at the ceiling.

"We met during an inter-platoon match. I knew his strength and popularity. However, I had no way to explain it clearly, and I thought there was some difference."

"That's true."

Samiraya relaxed, beginning to sort out her materials. She searched for the materials on section chiefs that should be collected . Other candidates wouldn't become like this, would they?

As expected, the problem lay in the Military Arts Head.

"What should we do?"

"So did things first start with Shante-senpai?"

"Hmm."

As Samiraya nodded her head, Leu began thinking carefully.

"Mmm, if we go visit holding a sympathetic attitude, it's still not that good. Moreover suddenly wanting to go to the hospital is the same."

"Right, that's true."

"What should we do, hmm..."

Even Leu couldn't instantly think of a good method.

"First, what kind of a person is Shante-senpai, we should first examine her habits together."

"Then, the examination of her habits will be assigned to Leu."

"Wait a second."

"I'll first go visit her."

"Don't worry about it, I won't let Gorneo-senpai notice."

Leu hadn't stopped speaking, but Samiraya had already left.

"Ugh, I was careless....." Leu sighed, realizing that the draft for the speech had not been prepared.

"I guess I'll go prepare it."

Her head started to hurt, since who exactly was the candidate? She thought of complaining to Samiraya later, but this was an almost useless action.

Actually, Samiraya going to the hospital to visit had not disturbed her.

In that room, Shante slept deeply on the bed, seemingly the same as during competitions, a red-haired girl with a petite frame.

Samiraya was aware that she herself was a small existence. Shante was also small.

Shante had lost consciousness.

She had no problems with her body. But she just wouldn't wake . That kind of state had continued up through today. Samiraya thanked the doctor who informed her of the patient's condition, and hurriedly left the hospital.

She didn't even have the energy to return to the school building, but then she had no way to let down her baggage. She didn't know what to do, but seeing bench, Samiraya sat down.

"Well....."

Maybe she didn't have any way to think about it.

The last commotion had been fairly long ago, and most of the injured people had been released from the hospital, even Samiraya presumably knew this. Even so, she was still hospitalized.

Perhaps that way of thinking was too simple.

She still lived, but she was unconscious.

Perhaps this obscured too many possibilities. Thinking of this, Samiraya could understand Gorneo's impatience.

Current medical technology was said to be able to treat anything unrelated to the brain or Kei vein, and it was said that even lost memories would be recovered.

But, even if the body was recovered, what could the medical students do if they declared that the body was unharmed but could not understand the reason why she was in a coma?

What could the person do who waited for her to wake up?

She really couldn't comprehend it.

"Uwah....."

Samiraya let out a soft and lingering sound. When she advanced she advanced with all her might, and when she was downcast she stayed downcast till the end, that was Samiraya. She herself didn't know whether there were any other situations between these two people.

Right now Samiraya was completely downcast. She didn't even know what she herself should do to make things better. For her own election, she thought of using the Shante who had not woken up from a coma - even if she understood her shallowness, she still could not help but blame her own stupidity.

"Wu..... Sure enough, I can only rely on other people."

Even so, she first had to think about the problems around her. Perhaps it should be said that all people were like this.

"Excuse me, are you okay?"

Hearing a voice, Samiraya raised her head. That moment, she saw the topic himself walking over.

"Layfon Alseif."

"Excuse me, where are you uncomfortable?"

Even though she knew the name of the person she met, it wasn't something particularly surprising. Platoon matches were seen everywhere. It had happened before that he was addressed by his name.

"Uh, hmm. I was just thinking about my situation, and I was a bit down."

"Could it be that you are a Student Council President candidate ?"

"Yeah. I'm Samiraya Mirke, nice to meet you."

"Ah, nice to meet you."

They shook hands, following the recent habit of this place. Not knowing what to do, they sized each other up, the two of them feeling a bit awkward.

"Hah....."

The two both sighed. This time it was really a meeting that would surprise people.

"......What?"

"No, no, what's wrong, it's clear that there's something just from looking at Senpai."

"What, you want me to apologize because your mood is down?"

"That's not what I meant, um, I, uh, how should I say it....."

"Really, don't just get depressed whenever."

Even if he mouthed protests, he didn't know why, but he felt that Layfon's depression had nothing to do with Samiraya.

"What? Was there something that made you lose heart in the previous battle?"

"....."

"Ah, never mind, never mind."

Looking at Layfon's expression, which had become gloomy during the chat, Samiraya felt anxious.

"Um, sorry."

"It's okay, it doesn't matter. Feel free to sit down."

"Okay."

The two people sat in a row on the bench.

But, he regretted it after sitting down. The two were very gloomy, but even if they sat together, it wasn't any use. They silently prayed that they could quickly return.

"So, do you have some kind of problem?"

"No....."

"You already don't want to talk?"

"Sorry."

"Fine!"

If she wanted him to return, she shouldn't have asked him to sit. Samiraya pouted and looked towards their front, devoid of people.

"If I may ask, does Senpai have a problem?"

"What? You don't want to talk about your own trouble, but want to listen to other people's situations?"

"Um, sorry."

They went silent again. But Samiraya was quickly unable to endure this kind of silence.

"So, was the battle this tiresome?"

"Hmm?"

"Us normal people have no way of understanding the emotions that people hold in the middle of battle. I want to hear about your way of thinking."

"Speaking of that, indeed it feels tiresome sometimes."

"Ah, is that so....."

Samiraya muttered in a small voice. She had not really thought about it before this.

"It really is choking. The people next to you can just easily disappear....."

"No one's left?"

"You, could it be that you can't say any comforting words?"

"Sorry."

"It's alright, I'm not the only one like this. Rather, I don't have the experience. But, perhaps I haven't experienced any situation more painful than this."

"....."

"Because I hold it and understand it, when I don't say anything it instead makes me suffer more."

"That....."

"Ah, well, I understand. Even things are that way I should still keep living on. Especially for me who has set becoming the Student Council President as my target, I have to consider the people who are living. There are no adults in Zuellni, so we all must be adults, so I can't ignore the reality placed in front of me.

Afterwards, she let out a big sigh. She sorted out her thoughts for a moment, selecting suitable words.

"However, the people who were once in the Academy City have been long gone. They all leave because they graduate. This place doesn't have death. If we follow the rules of the Academy City, graduation is like dying. We have no way to request the aid of those people. We can't see them again. Maybe. Some people think

that people who were born in different cities won't encounter each other again, but that is rational thinking. It's just the same as dying . Because they will already only appear in your memories."

"....."

"But memories are a form of solace. It's nothing more than that. That's how things are. That, that....."

When had this started, it wasn't her thoughts about Gorneo, but rather her own situation.

What was the reason for her longing to become the Student Council President?

"It's right in front of us. But I'm not bound by it. I don't want to be smug towards everyone, I want to be able to be sure of everything. That's where the problem lies."

"That....."

"Ahh, how embarrassing. I've just been spouting my head off. Anyway, that's all."

Samiraya satisfactorily said she understood her own thoughts.

"The problem is that right now if other people see me I won't feel any shame."

"Huh."

She saw that in Layfon's eyes flashed an inexplicable meaning. There were shadows. But, was this normal and commonplace for him, or had he been guided by dark things? She had no way of judging. Because she didn't understand the ordinary him, this was something she could do nothing about.

So, Samiraya had no way to hold back the things she had noticed and not said.

"In this Academy City, people get replaced every year. I myself had been here for six years. This world endlessly advances. In that kind of environment it's not possible to live leisurely. One needs to have something they want to do. If you have something you want to do then you will quickly and straightforwardly go do it. So we have to act."

"......But, you might be defeated, or nothing might happen, so then what do you do?"

This was something that Layfon disclosed from deep inside his heart. But to Samiraya, this was impossible to comprehend, and she really didn't understand Layfon's situation.

If Nina and Felli were there, perhaps this dialogue would not have been interrupted, and they would have understood.

But, Samiraya didn't know. Even if could see some desperate signs in his words, right now was not the time to hesitate.

"Losing isn't anything bad. Wasting time on regret is too much of a pity. Since you can't find it, why not try doing something else. My fundamental problem is that I don't know whether I have the ability to serve as the Student Council President or not. I have times when I want to rely on my friends or when I don't feel that many people support me, and I don't know if I can win the election. But I still want to try. So I'm doing it. When I feel that it won't work, then I'll think about looking into something else. That's why I always know what I want."

Layfon was overwhelmed by the momentum of her language, and Samiraya stood up. Even for the petite Samiraya, when she stood up she could look down upon the seated Layfon. However, the shadows swayed in his eyes as he looked upwards.

"Perhaps it's only because I don't have any responsibility that I act when I want to act. But, isn't it good to be able to rest when you want to rest? Even if it doesn't really match what I just said, even though you've lived in an Academy City for six years, your life definitely won't end in only six years."

"But....."

"The Military Arts Competition has already ended. Zuellni's crisis has already passed. Next year is a year to rest."

Samiraya announced this, but didn't stop her steps, since she had found something that she wanted to do. All that was left was action. Samiraya Mirke's thought of a question while simultaneously running and pondering.

It had to do with Layfon Alseif.

It had to do with having him become the Military Arts Head.

(It won't do. I feel like he's not very reliable.)

But, she also thought the reason for that kind of unreliability was because the shadows of things were binding his feet. Even if he didn't become the Military Arts Head, it would be good if some day those shadows disappeared.

Either way, he was a student of Zuellni.

But, this way of thinking lasted nothing more than a moment.

Flying aboard the tram that had just stopped in front of the station, no matter what she wanted to convince Gorneo. She had been thinking of that situation all along.

Later, the name Gorneo Luckens was impressively written in the Student Council supplement that the Samiraya faction published.

Chapter 3: The Dispatched One

On the letter was written such a short sentence.

"I'm near. I'll be at your place soon!"

Not that he hadn't thought of its meaning. Though it was common not to have the sender's address written on the envelope, the location of the sender was evident by the seal of Kelnes.

"What's this?" Sharnid said, tightening his hold on the letter. This name attracted his notice. Kelnes, the City of Medicine. Sharnid was trying to deduce the deeper meaning behind it.

Had that person come?

But what was he planning?

And why Kelnes?

The letter in his hand had become a ball. His hand hurt. This level of pain was nothing to a Military Artist, not to mention a normal person, but right now, it seemed to be stressing on its own existence in the pain it inflicted on him. Sharnid left the room and headed for the Training Complex as usual. But how meaningful was this act? Probably not very. But Military Artists started training in order to survive, and then the future situation was ended by some faceless person.

"I wasn't thinking of becoming a hero, but even I couldn't predict this result."

This was what it felt like to be helpless. He hated himself for not being able to do anything. But he didn't think the choice he made back then was wrong. He only did what he could do at that place, accurately evaluating his strength, and made the correct response to prevent the situation from worsening, and then he survived. If he had died, nothing could have be done. Otherwise right now, he wouldn't have been able to do anything, whether it was about a goal or to obtain something he desired. Everything was meaningless in death.

He pondered as he walked. When he came to, he realized he was outside the hospital. The area here was different from the area that received outside patients. This area was especially tranquil. The nurses came and went. Visitors and patients chatted. But for some reason, there were no echoes. The quietness seemed to be absorbing the noise, making it vanish. Background noise was not background noise. Sharnid balked at this quietness. It halted his steps.

Once he reached upstairs, he had reached his destination. He knew this place already, but he still had to check the room numbers he went. Coming to the hospital was part of being polite. He didn't have to do that much, but he still did it.

Though he had said something to her that he "can't come", if he couldn't even do such a simple thing as visiting, then he really could do nothing.

Dinn was before him. His best friend whom he later firmly parted with.

"What do you mean?"

That exaggerated threat broke the silence.

"Shena."

The atmosphere in the hospital turned heavy through that piercing voice. The air seemed to have turned stiff. Sharnid ran to the room. The door was opened, and entering Sharnid's vision was Dalshena's angry face and the back of a man standing in front of him, plus Dinn, looking outside the window, ignoring everything around him. For some reason, this felt like a strange comedy. Sharnid swallowed the words he wanted to say and waited quietly .

"Sharnid."

Dalshena looked at him.

"Uh?"

That man heard the noise and turned around. He wasn't someone from Zuellni. He was around 20 years or so. Underneath his slightly dirtied clothes was a build with muscles that Sharnid would never be able to have no matter how hard he trained.

The man's face was turned sideways. He seemed to be looking this way, and he was also someone Sharnid knew. What a laughable comedy.

He knew all three of them, but they shouldn't be meeting here.

"Oi, son."

That man greeted him.

He was tall and powerful, taller than Sharnid by a head, and the body bigger by a waistline. And he possessed Sharnid's handsome features, plus the solemn dignity of a boulder that had been baptized by days of wind and snow. That man was called Elrad Elipton.

"Old man, how come you're here?"

"Didn't someone send you a letter?"

"Ah, I only got it yesterday."

"What the. We arrived at the same time. As I said, letters can't be trusted," Elrad said with a sign of tiredness on his face. He watched Dalshena.

"You knew each other? Then that's good. I'm here because of work. But this little girl here is interfering."

"What?"

"Work? What work?"

The first thing Sharnid thought of in this unexpected situation was to calm down. If everyone reacted through their emotions, they would never get anywhere.

"Well....."

Saying that, his father pointed his thumb, fairly slender for his enormous build, at Dinn, who was still continuing to act as if this did not concern him.

"Is this part of your work too, dad?"

"Ah, I'm like a weed here without roots. If the job description matches the pay, I'd do it no matter what."

Sharnid felt Dalshena's gaze behind Elrad, and he felt a chill down his back. She must hold him in contempt now, he thought.

"He can be treated here too. Isn't it reckless to get him to ride a roaming bus when he's ill?"

"He's a patient, but he won't die as long as the drip is there. I have comrades to look after him too. Besides, he's not a baby who needs constant care, lying on a bed."

"You."

Those were words that couldn't solve the problem even though he had been insulted, besides, he knew his father had said it

deliberately. Because he knew his son's persuasion would be fruitless. Even so, it didn't sit well with Sharnid that his dad had seen through him.

"Shena. Stop."

Right now, he must stop her no matter what. But his words were useless. The furious Shena had no intention of stopping.

She pulled out her Dite, restored and rushed him. A wind materialized in his not so spacious room, and the floor tiles promptly became a mess. Dinn was still gazing out the window with his empty eyes.

Elrad hadn't changed his position, but he had grabbed hold of the lance with his bare hand. What came next was the thundering sound of metal breaking. The lance was broken by his force.

"Ah."

Dalshena's expression was one of disbelief as she watched the event unfold.

"Calm down a bit, little girl," Elrad said to her, turning around, forcing her to his table through his overwhelming advantage.

"I won't take him and leave immediately. My side needs some preparation too. Of course, we'll take care of the cost of transport. Besides, it isn't that far away."

"Uh."

Though she knew she could escape by leaving her weapon, Dalshena didn't do that. She looked at him with abhorrence, the man who had stopped her with one hand only.

"That's enough, dad. Let her go."

"Right."

He released the weapon and Dalshena sat down on the floor.

"That's it son. Take her and go. We don't get to meet much. Should take some time to solidify our father and son relationship."

"You always say such revolting thing."

Elrad smiled and left the room.

But Sharnid had no intention of seeing him go.

Regret filled Dalshena. Dinn kept looking through the window as if nothing had happened.

"Kuh."

Dalshena turned to him. She didn't mean to. Perhaps she wanted to chase after Elrad but that wasn't it. Sharnid didn't know what to do so he only stood there.

Elrad Elipton was a professional mercenary. Sharnid's time with his dad was when hid dad was a mercenary. Sharnid had followed him, traveling from city to city for many years. From when he turned from a mere boy to someone with awareness, he had only

been on the roaming bus. They had never settled down in any one city. It was already incredible to Sharnid that he managed to stay in Zuellni for four years.

Not that it felt good to him.

He had once attempted to destroy such a life.

He never thought his father would appear here.

Not knowing what to do, Sharnid left the hospital as if Dalshena had kicked him out. He wanted to think of the next move but he couldn't think of anything. Was he to return to the old days? Even if he was to ponder it, no answer was forthcoming. Besides, he just couldn't imagine it being with his father.

"Ah, damn."

Sharnid let out a breath. Things hadn't been resolved. He was just confirming the irritation inside him. Where should he go? He didn't know.

"What should I do?" he murmured as he lifted his head to look at the hospital.

Still, it wasn't as if there weren't any possible actions available. Since Dinn's condition hadn't improved, this meant Zuellni's current technology wasn't enough to treat him. Besides this was an Academy City, a city of students. It wouldn't be entirely impossible for students to be experimenting with Dinn due to the lack of mature technology. They might need that experiment in

order to invent technology to call back one's consciousness. That was for Dinn and for patients in the future who might exhibit Dinn's conditions. But there existed a certain risk, and that remained unknown to Dinn.

Was it good to leave his former best friend in this condition?

This doubt surfaced in Sharnid's mind.

Then wasn't it better for Dinn to be taken back? Dinn belonged to a Military Arts family in Kelnes. He was part of the upper society. It seemed that Dinn left his home due to dissatisfaction with his family. For Dinn, he left his home city to look for help rather than to protect Zuellni. He must have borne a heavy determination to do this. Zuellni understood there must be a reason behind Dinn's action.

He hadn't seen Dalshena's angry eyes for so long. Sharnid had lost but he still wasn't willing to let go. Was he to wait till the time when he was to truly lose it?

"No."

In a sense, he could think that the current Dinn belonged to Dalshena.

"Don't think of it the wrong way."

The wrong way? Dalshena? Or was it himself thinking of such foul things?

Probably the latter.

It didn't matter about Dalshena. Even Sharnid himself didn't want to let Dinn go. He was now heavily swayed because he knew Dinn might die.

"What should I do?" he complained again as he finally left the hospital.

One answer came to him. Do nothing.

He walked for a while, turned a corner and could no longer see the hospital.

"Uh."

Elrad was waiting.

"Dad."

"Long time no see. Can't we chat for a bit?"

"I'm touched to tears by your love for always guarding me."

Elrad must have been watching him otherwise he wouldn't have appeared here right at this moment.

"Be moved."

The eyes that looked so much like Sharnid's were filled with love, but Sharnid hated that feeling. He sighed.

"Anyway, take that pretty girl to a quiet place for a chat."

His request was quickly denied. There was a café nearby but it was still quite some time till it opened.

"What a boring city."

"Where do you think this is?"

"A little flower full of liveliness. Oh, yes, how about hiring me as a teacher? Then I can give you a discount. Call me a good person."

"Ah, I'd be happy to tie you up and kick you out."

"What? You want to have me to yourself? In that case don't call me father. Might as well call each other brothers."

They entered the shop as they chatted. It was a shop with atmosphere but there weren't many customers.

"What?"

"You're noisy. It's still early."

"Time is of no consequence to a brat who is in love."

"What're you saying?"

"My theory."

No one would say that with a confident air. Besides, the world didn't have such a place for such a person. Sharnid silently chose a table without any customers around it.

"Then why did you accept that job?" he asked after the waiter had left with their orders.

"Well, sometimes I also want to do something befitting a parent, to come and see my son. But I never thought my item would be someone you know well."

"Don't compare a person to an item."

"Um?"

Elrad sat down on the narrow chair and frowned.

"Ahh. I see. Someone you know. I'm not all that sensitive with that kind of thing. Sorry."

Sharnid shook his head at his father's insincere apology. Never mind.

He knew his father's personality. And so no further words were exchanged on the topic. He also knew their relationship wouldn't improve because of this.

"Speaking of which, have you done it with that girl?"

The waitress bringing over two cups of tea gave a shocked expression at his words. She looked at Sharnid with contempt.

Sharnid watched his father with dissatisfaction. He knew dad was that kind of a person. He didn't hold a grudge anymore as he finally understood, and it was exactly because he was that kind of

a person that it was normal for Sharnid not to know who his mother was. But. Never mind. Even now he still wanted to know who his mother was, but knowing wouldn't change the fact that he was still Sharnid Elipton. The important thing was she was a woman who would give her son to such a father. Even in a part not hidden in a dramatic TV show, it was a boring fact that one would know. The important thing was Sharnid himself wasn't all that adverse to it.

Apart from feeling regretful for creating such a scene.

"What. Not yet?" Elrad stared at him regardless of the consequence. "I don't understand it. When I was your age, I wouldn't give a woman I wanted time to rest."

"You're so annoying. I don't want to repeat your path," he said to his father who was prone to abandoning his work.

"Compared to that, dad, can't you think of a perfect plan to not bring Dinn back?"

"What? So your aim is to rely on someone else?"

"Tsk."

"Impossible." Sharnid had expected a debate but his father's personality wouldn't allow it.

"If you still hold a father and son relationship with me, then think of that brat's parents. The job was requested by his parents."

Sharnid could only listen.

"The important thing is the level of technology here can't treat him. The city of Kelnes is good at treating post-Kei acceleration drug symptoms."

"What did you say?"

"You're so stupid. I'm saying the City of Kelnes invented the Kei acceleration drug."

That fool of a city that never thought of the consequences of its actions. Dinn hadn't rejected it. Or perhaps to Dinn, who wanted to increase his strength, using drugs itself wasn't permissible.

Yet Sharnid thought this suited Dinn's thinking.

"So you....."

"Uh?"

"Have already used it. The way to increase your strength. The one I taught you."

"....."

"It comes from your feelings. Did you use it to run away? You idiot."

"But that couldn't be helped."

Feeling the sudden chill down his back, Sharnid turned his face away. At that time, he had over-exhausted his Kei vein by using

that move, and he was forced to stay in the hospital for a whole day. But for the present Sharnid, that wouldn't have been a problem.

Still, he couldn't escape Elrad's eyes.

"Couldn't be helped."

Elrad's cold gaze pinned him.

"A fight has already begun from the moment of creating victory. The last moment to turn a situation around also embodies the victory or defeat of a fight. You did that even though your strength was not enough, and that is evidence of your immaturity."

"..... What would you do if you can't see victory no matter what ?"

"Run away. I already told you that's why that move was made."

Sharnid looked at the ceiling seriously. His dad's hypothesis " though defeat is very probable but escaping is not impossible" didn't exist. Of course it was natural to want to run away when that happened. And if the city was destroyed, then all he needed was to escape from it. That was the way the mercenary, Elrad Elipton, thought. A very human factor. To rely on a factor of non-defeat. Elrad would never miss that chance.

On the second day.

Sharnid could only pass his day in confusion as he still hadn't thought of a good way. The Training Complex was closed off because it was being fixed, and so they didn't have platoon training.

The plan to rebuild Zuellni was almost at an end. The entire city exuded relief, but not Sharnid. Either way, his conclusion was that it was good for Dinn to return to his city, but Sharnid wasn't happy about that.

"What should I do?"

With nothing to do after school, Sharnid sighed as he walked through the school ground aimlessly.

"Ah, Sharnid-senpai."

Sharnid looked up and saw Harley driving a truck. The city had made many of such vehicles to transport items that were too big to move by hand. The truck could even transport people.

"Hey."

"You look bored."

"Yeah, bored."

He replied with his usual flare. He didn't feel that pained right now.

"Speaking of which, what are you doing?" Sharnid couldn't think of a reason behind Harley's action as he was just leaving the Alchemy building.

"I'm borrowing this to help move."

"Moving?"

At this time, the junior students were finding houses to move into. It would take the graduates some time to move their things out.

"Didn't you hear? Layfon has found a new house."

"I see."

"I'm helping now."

"Right."

Layfon hadn't been showing up at platoon training. Sharnid understood that and had decided to leave him alone. Only time could heal the wound in his heart, though as for whether it would heal or not, Sharnid didn't know. Was his own problem the same, one that only time could wash clean?

"Since I've nothing to do, I'll go check it out. It is Layfon's new home after all."

"Come and help out."

"Ok."

Sharnid took the wheel and pressed down the switch button. The truck accelerated. Harley wailed as the engine howled, seeing how Sharnid was driving over the speed limit.

Their destination was Layfon's former home, the male dormitory 1.

"Who remodeled the truck?"

Harley was exhausted when they arrived.

"Isn't this thing quite good?"

"No. It's not possible for it to have that speed. Damn. I'd get caught for remodeling it."

"Well, we've saved some time thanks to this truck," Sharnid gave Harley a pat on the back and headed for the door. Layfon was already waiting with his luggage.

"Hey, that's all you've got?"

By Layfon's feet lay the sports bag he had been using since the beginning of term, a suitcase and three boxes.

"The furniture is originally the dorm's. I've already packed everything like clothes except for the textbooks."

"Ahhh. Can't you be less ridiculous for being a bore?"

"This is already more than I expected."

Layfon had thought one suitcase was enough.

"Well, never mind. It's not bad to finish this quickly."

They quickly stowed the luggage on the back of the vehicle, which made the vehicle lose its balance. But at least the front wheel hadn't left the ground. Harley drove the vehicle while the two fell behind it.

"And where are we moving these things to?"

"Somewhere near the cargo area."

"Really?"

Though he was speaking, the distance between the two of them hadn't widened. Besides, Harley was driving at the running speed of a person. A normal person could speak while running next to the vehicle.

.....Still, he wasn't so sure of the content of the conversation.

Looking at Layfon, it seemed he was recovering. He didn't look to be particularly anxious. This was a special trademark of Layfon's in times of peace, or perhaps it was a symbol of cunningness. An expression that could be seen through so easily meant Layfon still hadn't tided up his feelings. He still hadn't let it go. Sharnid felt that Layfon didn't even dare think about it.

For Sharnid, he felt he didn't understand his own feeling. Feeling like light wind was his natural demeanour. He didn't think Layfon was the same as him, but if he was what Sharnid thought he was, then perhaps he was unconsciously operating behind his own defences. (Meaning, he was running away.)

(It's not possible to recover simply.)

Sharnid was not party to the details of the things that happened to Layfon in Grendan since he returned to Zuellni halfway. Felli seemed to know everything but she hadn't spoken to anyone about it. Nina too. But probably not the Student President.

But Sharnid could kind of guess from Layfon's expression. The Layfon who dragged his feet back to Zuellni as he left Grendan. And he looked like he had lost his soul. This was enough. This was the cause of his childhood friend, Leerin. He had failed to take her back, whether it was physically or mentally. Even if Leerin didn't return to Zuellni, Layfon wouldn't have had this expression if the two of them had talked it through.

(Ah~Ah.....)

The current Layfon was like Sharnid.

(If it were me, what am I trying to protect?)

Or, one could say, what did he want to take back?

They arrived at their destination while Sharnid was pondering. It was a very old and dirty building. The house was originally

white on the outside but spots of black adorned its walls after long periods of erosion from rain and wind.

"Wah. No way?"

Sharnid couldn't believe this building was still standing.

"You can tell there's no one instead, but it still has its value," Harley speculated.

That must be it. There was a residential area around here, and this place was very close to the cargo area, but it was quite far from the more popular streets. Since it was close to the cargo area, it wouldn't be too far away from the farms and the fish farms. It would have been dangerous to place cargo near the residential area and the streets because of fire concerns. Of course it should be placed somewhere further away from houses. And so this housing area was only temporary. It would be demolished if the cargo area needed expanding. But right now, there was no such need.

"I was wondering whether you really were going to move in."

"It's close to the tram station so it's not that inconvenient."

"But isn't that the tram for cargoes?"

Ignoring the suddenly speechless Sharnid and Harley, Layfon started moving his luggage into the house. The two could only leave this topic. The luggage was not much and since there were two Military Artists here, they didn't need to return to the vehicle again.

They realized someone was already here after they entered the house.

"Ah, Layton. The furniture is almost done," Naruki said.

"Thanks. Ah, sorry about this."

"That's fine. It's pretty easy."

Nina showed herself at the voice. "Layfon, come and decide where the furniture should be placed."

"Sorry, Captain, I should be assembling the furniture."

"Don't worry. Didn't Naruki say that it was easy?"

It seemed Nina and Naruki had already assembled the furniture when Layfon and they went to move the luggage.

"What. There's nothing for me to do," Sharnid said.

"There are still some electrical appliances that need installing," Nina pointed at the boxes.

"Wa, that's too complicated."

"Speaking of which, that seems to be my job."

"Oh, then I'll leave it to you. So there's nothing for me to do now ?"

"Right right."

Layfon, Nina and the others already headed inside the house to put the furniture in the right places.

Sharnid opened the box. Inside were cheap electrical appliances.

"..... Uh?"

He found her.

Sharnid was in the living room at the moment. This room was very big. Even the left-behind boxes and various rubbish from the furniture weren't enough to fill the room. And in the area, with her back leaning against the wall, was a person.

"What are you doing?"

Felli.

"Reading because I have time."

Felli flipped a page.

"Come and help."

"You want me to do physical work?"

"Then what are you sitting there for?"

"This."

Sitting next to her was the Light Dite in its restored form.

"Uh?"

"I have a feast to attend after this, so we have to prepare the dishes. It'll take about one more hour to finish the work here, after that, I'll have to help out with bringing the girls over."

So Felli was here to take care of the communicating.

Meishen and Mifi were currently preparing the dishes. Since eating utensils weren't enough, plus the house was in a dusty state, it was more hygienic, less time consuming, and much cheaper to get a restaurant to prepare dinner than here. And that was also the reason why Naruki was left behind, though she was always with the other two.

"And then. That's it?"

"That's it. Are you not satisfied with anything else?"

"No. Let's do our best."

Sharnid said to the Felli who looked like she was about to bite a piece off of him as he took out an electrical appliance from a box.

It took them less than an hour to assemble the bigger appliances . Naruki took the car to get Meishen and Mifi. Layfon was tidying up the room. Nina and Felli took care of the boxes and began to sweep the floor. Harley started checking the finer details of installing the electrical appliances.

Having finished his part for now, Sharnid went to the veranda. From here he could see the entire view of the storage area, all the

way to the legs of the city and then the scenery of the outside world. It was as if a veil of white was shrouding the wilderness, as if one were flying in the sky.

And Dinn was about to leave here.

From the very beginning, Sharnid had been the one to abandon others.

He had begun his journey when he followed his father around, who was hired as a mercenary. He traversed between cities. Day by day. He was used to sleeping on a roaming bus, so used to it that he wouldn't be able to sleep on a bed. That was how he lived his daily life. Sharnid was always the one to first say goodbye to friends of his own age.

He hadn't been abandoned before.

The word "goodbye" was good to the one who said it, since he had already prepared his heart for it. But for the side that received this word, the feeling probably wasn't mutual.

He recalled the faces of those he had to suddenly part with, trying to understand their feelings.

They probably felt the same as he did now. Though this wasn't unreasonable, it wasn't something he could have done about it.

It was impossible to simply walk through the air shield. Could he survive out there? He remembered..... The former captain of the 10th platoon. He recalled the scene when she left. That wound

had been healed, or perhaps it made people feel that it had been healed, but (in reality), it was just a way to avoid the feeling of loneliness.

Sharnid had been in this city for 4 years now. What changes had occurred in him? Could he now sleep in a bed?

Training in Military Arts required his own persistence, and that point hadn't changed. He didn't feel any discomfort for continuing to stay here. He was full of spirit when he was training alone. That part hadn't changed.

Still, he hadn't managed to be honest with others.

Ahah. Speaking of which.

That night at Grendan. The honest talk. Layfon hadn't given off this feeling.

He felt embarrassed, but then that timing was the worst ever.

Perhaps the Academy City was the same. At least it was that kind of an existence to him. Sharnid was here because of the people he had met. Perhaps even he himself wasn't sure. He had suddenly come to the Academy City. Suddenly left Elrad. He still didn't know why he made that decision back then. But it was certain that he had prioritized learning by staying in Zuellni. In that case, it was a matter of fact to accept the near-future that he would have to say farewell to Dinn.

Could he really accept it?

"What's wrong?"

He turned around at the sound. Nina was putting down a bag of rubbish on the veranda. Sharnid felt embarrassed that he didn't even know she was near as he was too deeply in thought.

"What is it?"

"Ah. Nothing. You look terrible."

"Uh? Really?"

"If anything is troubling you....."

"It's nothing."

He tried hard to hide it, turning back to his normal expression.

"Really?"

Nina didn't believe him but she turned back to the house. They had almost finished tidying up the place, and Layfon was almost done with his luggage. Only Harley seemed to be still busy, checking things here and there. And he seemed to want to make some suggestions.

Layfon was in a fluster, not knowing what to do. Because Felli was glaring at him with a pale face.

Layfon was here.

Nina was here.

The Military Artist with immense fighting power and was an original Heaven's Blade Successor was here.

The Military Artist with a power like fire, her body taken by the Electronic Fairy of an abandoned city, was here.

Even Elrad couldn't be able to fight against these two. Besides, he wasn't interested in a fight he couldn't win.

Sharnid could stop him from taking Dinn if he gave it his all. He was their senpai, their comrade. He had fought with them till the last person. There must be a way if he asked them. He just needed to ask for their help, facing their laughing faces.

There were still two years.

Still two years till he graduated. The same year as Dinn. Either way, he would have to leave this city after two years. That was the rule of the Academy City. Not that he wanted to break the rule. But he only had two years. It was good that he still had time left. He could persuade them.

"..... What am I thinking?"

Could he tell them? What kind of expression should he make? He couldn't imagine it. He had always been talkative. Pretentious. With what expression should he say this? Back then when they fought against the 10th platoon he had talked to Layfon alone about it. He regretted his immature action. Did he want to do more regrettable things?

But it was too big a temptation for him.

"Ahhhh. I can't stand it."

Something had changed on the opposite side of the glass. Naruki and her two friends were here. They were carrying a large number of bentos, and they were backed by Meishen's powerful cooking. They had all tried the tasty cooking in the camp. Everyone cheered. Only Felli seemed to feel different with a reluctant expression on her face.

"Ah. This is how it is," Sharnid said. "I felt the same before."

Sharnid, Dinn and Dalshena.

He recalled the time when the three of them were together. The scenes that he couldn't take back were trapping his feet. No matter how much time had passed, Sharnid still couldn't genuinely melt into the circle now.

After that, the feast lasted till deep into the night. Claribel came midway with a gift to celebrate, making the feast more vibrant. When everyone was tired, they went to sleep. Sharnid was the only person to leave the house.

The time limit was up.

Sharnid came to the outer-edge of the city, where the roaming bus stop was.

The roaming bus was painted with a special color to show that it was private property. There were many people in the waiting area.

All roaming buses were connected by the Electronic Fairy of the Traffic City Joeldem, in order to correctly coordinate the buses according to the locations of various cities. However, roaming buses for travelers were not the only type of buses. There were other buses also that served other purposes.

The roaming bus of the Salinvan Guidance Mercenary Gang had come to Zuellni before, and now Elrad. The roaming bus at the bus stop might belong to Dinn's family.

"Yo, you're here."

Elrad was waiting with nothing to do in the waiting area. He waved at Sharnid. A number of adults immediately headed over as if to guard the person sitting in the wheelchair, Dinn.

As if they were protecting someone important. Not everyone was here, but there were Military Artists in the group.

"Ah....." Sharnid muttered helplessly.

Dinn, who was sitting in the wheelchair, didn't look at him. His glassy eyes were staring at the scenery of the outer-edge.

It was impossible for him to reply. And even more impossible for him to choose.

Sharnid had no other way but to watch Dinn leave.

"Ah, what bad timing. The preparation is done but the other side is bad. We can't leave as long as the wind doesn't stop. I want to head out early too, but that can't be helped since we can't see anything before us."

"Oh....."

Speaking of which, Sharnid already noticed it, that the wind outside the city was particularly strong today. A roaming bus wouldn't be able to move even if it was in the middle of the wilderness. This situation wasn't uncommon. The problem wasn't just low visibility. Accompanying the wind were pollutants of high density, and at times, filth monsters. Sharnid seemed to have heard of it before.

But all that mattered not to him as he watched his father who was about to leave.

"Do you have anything else to say? This is your last chance."

Was what Elrad said.

"Well, don't say anything if you plan to leave this city for Kelnes ," he continued. Elrad had no conclusion as to where his son decided to settle down in eventually. No. Elrad probably had a different way of thinking than normal travelers. Or perhaps he would never have thought so deeply about this issue.

"Never mind."

Sharnid turned around and didn't look at the faraway Dinn anymore. He didn't know what to say. He didn't know what to say to Dinn. Not sure if words could convey his message. Besides, even if it worked, he wouldn't have known how Dinn would comprehend those words. Did Dinn still harbor hatred for him now? Or had he let it go already? Or was it all just Sharnid's own thinking?

Sharnid's feet wouldn't move. He could only watch Dinn's back from here.

"Isn't it better to give up?"

So sudden.

Elrad said so suddenly.

Other voice came to Sharnid before he had time to digest the meaning behind the words. It was the sound of running feet. No. The sound of leaping feet and wind being cut apart.

Shena.....

Not only was that the case.

Someone else was quietly following Dalshena apart from her rude voice that tore apart the sky, as if even the air itself was giving way to him. Both of them stopped before Sharnid.

"Bastard....."

The word came from between clenched teeth.

It was Layfon. He was standing with Dalshena. Hanging from his weapon harness were his Dites. His expression was sharper than when he was moving house, and he was now standing a little ahead, adjacent to Dalshena.

"Aya..... This guy is hard to handle."

Elrad had already seen through Layfon's fighting strength with one glance.

No. Sharnid couldn't sit still and do nothing.

"Shena!" he shouted.

"What? What else you have to say?!"

Why? Even he himself didn't know. It must be the words of the devil. Just like how it attacked Sharnid, it had also said the same words to Dalshena. The correct reasoning was to have an overwhelming power that would make Elrad back off. And so Sharnid had stopped thinking and acting.

But Dalshena had acted.

"What do you know?!" Dalshena was angered by her inability to do anything. "How can you know my feelings? You who easily gave up?"

Sharnid was speechless, shocked by her words.

"Ah..... Anyway, let's deal with the situation now."

Elrad watched the two of them as he instructed the guards.

"Don't let the boy go. Want to use full power? Not bad. And then?" he asked Dalshena. Elrad watched her twisted face. He never once glanced at Layfon.

Elrad knew Dalshena was the one who triggered this situation.

But Sharnid was worried. He hadn't seen Layfon's expression in the midst of battle for a long time. Layfon's expression gave him a sense of unease.

Elrad finally glanced at Layfon. Perhaps he had been defeated by the feeling Layfon exuded.

"You sure this is fine? Zuellni has no way to cure this guy. He might be cured in Kelnes. Either way, that place is his home city. Are you fine with this?"

What Elrad said was correct. He continued to throw the right words at them, making them unable to breathe. Correctly drawing the boundary between feelings and what was right. The skills that came from experience became crucial here. Smother one's feelings.

Sharnid couldn't breathe either. Dalshena's expression remained twisted. Only Layfon was unmoved. The passion in his pupils made one think he could do more than just saving others.

"I don't care what is right or wrong," Layfon said curtly. Even Dalshena was shocked by him.

"I don't know what is right. I'm doing what I'm doing now because I heard the wish of not wanting that person to leave."

Ahah.

That feeling while looking at the sky. He looked at Layfon with that kind of feeling.

Layfon was influenced by that feeling, so much that he wanted to cry. He must now be feeling again the pain of losing his childhood friend, Leerin.

Stupid.

Sharnid could not mutter. Even he himself didn't know who he was saying those words to. To Layfon? Or Dalshena who told Layfon of this? Or to himself who could do nothing but stand here.

"Tsk."

Elrad stood before them with impatience. In his weapon harness were three Dites. Layfon also leapt over to him.

Sharnid didn't see how he leapt.

The light of restoration was already lit in Elrad's two hands. In Layfon's hand too. The Sapphire Dite in the shape of a katana.

A sharp cut path was drawn. It was drawn.

Next were two blades blocking the attack.

Guns. In Elrad's hands were two guns. They had blocked Layfon's attack.

"Gunmanship....."

"Don't underestimate me, little brat," Elrad roared. And next he was gone.

Release Sakkei and moving in an instant. All high level moves. Though Sharnid knew what techniques Elrad was using, he had no idea where he was now.

But Layfon knew.

Layfon hadn't moved. But he had blocked the attack slightly to the left of his back. This was the biggest blind spot for a right-handed fighter. But Layfon blocked it without moving an inch.

"Not bad."

Only Elrad's voice came to Sharnid's ears. That figure had once again moved with Sakkei to confuse his opponent. Disappeared from view. Layfon now moved. Countless number of bullets headed for his spot. Numerous bullets shot through the brick-paved area of the outer-edge.

Elrad wasn't standing beside Layfon. He had judged Layfon's fighting power in a split second and turned this into a long distance fight. Sharnid's sight couldn't capture Elrad's presence which continued to appear and disappear. Elrad was in the

outer-edge, appearing and disappearing ceaselessly, while Layfon was calmly evading in the rain of bullets.

"....."

Layfon was saying something.

The Sapphire Dite lit up again in his right hand. And it became the Steel Threads. The weapon was too powerful. It was sealed due to the orders of the Student Council. It wouldn't have become reality in a peaceful period if not for Harley.

Did all members of the 17th platoon know of this?

No.....

It was strange that Nina wasn't here. Was this Layfon's decision alone? Had he decided that there was a need for the Steel Thread setting when he heard from Dalshena? Or was he worried that he couldn't use his full strength? He was much better at using katana than the Steel Threads, but he had used both in Grendan.

He couldn't forgive himself for not using his full strength here.

Layfon stopped once more. The steel threads stopped Elrad's attack in the air, giving off lots of sparks. On the other hand, he had moved the Sapphire Dite to his left hand. In his right hand was a new Dite. He had pulled out the Shim Adamantium Dite. Restored. The blade of the night appeared. He stood with sparks

wreathing up an invisible blade. A blade of darkness. His pose made Sharnid shiver. He had seen Layfon in numerous battles, but he had never seen his expression like this. Never.

He was about to use something unbelievable.

That was Sharnid's instinct. Appearing and disappearing again. Attacking again and again with his guns, Elrad's expression could be clearly seen. Layfon was an opponent stronger than he had expected. Elrad probably felt that.

In that case he would have to stop Layfon from using more moves.

Not sure of the reason, but Sharnid knew that he couldn't keep that expression while selfishly thinking this had nothing to do with Layfon.

"That's enough...." But he couldn't continue with his words.

The sudden murderous intent made him jump. Dalshena was ready with her lance.

"Shena!"

"You can't stop me!"

"Damn."

Sharnid restored his Dite. Two guns appeared in his hands. Sharnid was ready for battle as he watched her.

"This isn't the time for it....."

"Then do we let Dinn go? To see them? Dinn hates them."

"Yes."

Right. Dinn hated Kelnes. And that was how Sharnid knew of the ugliness of that city.

"I won't allow it!"

The balance collapsed. Though Shanrid was good at close quarters combat, he had no chance of winning against Dalshena who was born in the world of it. Strength suffused the tip of the lance. Sharnid evaded it just before it reached his eyebrows. He wanted to escape from the consecutive attacks but that wasn't possible. Dalshena had grown a lot compared to when she was in the 10th platoon, especially with her training of her lower limbs. Her feet were directly controlling her attacks so the distance between the two of them wouldn't widen.

The bullets in his guns were the anesthetic bullets used in a match. They couldn't kill a person. Sharnid shot without a burden, trying his best to control Dalshena's movements.

".....tsk!"

A bullet skimmed across her abdomen. The expression of Dalshena twisted. A direct hit from the bullet and Kei in it would have paralyzed her, but the previous attack wasn't one and so had no such effect. Still, Sharnid could see she was a bit flustered.

The hope of settling it once and for all could only prove Sharnid's naivety.

"Tsk!"

She wasn't too far from him, adjusting her breathing while continuing to attack. He almost evaded the attack, but his moment of opening made it impossible.

The lance broke through....

Her lance came straight down. Kei made its tip a weapon to stab through Sharnid's abdomen.

"Uh....."

He felt the sound from his ribs and retreated with quick steps. But Dalshena closed the distance between them. She held the small blade hidden in the lance. The lance stabbed without pattern as the small blade turned into a dance. Close quarters combat. But also a fight that could be decided by the lance in the blink of an eye. It was gradually becoming a one on one sword fight, and that was way beyond what Sharnid could handle.

The safety setting of her Dite wouldn't go out of control because it was Dalshena. But no matter how clumsy the small blade was, it had left injuries on Sharnid's body. Pain assaulted him.

This wasn't the time for that. Sharnid continued to evade as he thought. Though this wasn't the time to look at Layfon, he knew Layfon looked different from usual. He must stop this fight. Layfon was here because he didn't want to lose again.

"Damn....."

He deliberately made an opening as he desperately evaded the attack. At the same time, he had finally seen through Dalshena's messy attack. This really was like her style. She obviously wanted to finish this quickly, thinking that she could end it without hesitation.

And so she had seen his opening.

And so came the stab.

This was as expected. She used the small blade to influence the fight, to find a breakthrough point in moves that were set in stone.

Sharnid himself made this opening and so he knew which direction the stab would come.

Though the tip of the lance was slow, the apparent result was inevitable as he wanted to stop the tip with his palm.

Pain pierced him. He felt metal bore through his hand. He used his fingers while terror cut through him. His hand grabbed hers rightly.

Dalshena was speechless.

"What're you playing at?" Sharnid said through clenched teeth as he bore the pain. "Don't involve others in our problem."

"What....."

"Do you want that guy to follow our footsteps?"

Perhaps in this situation, perhaps these words, were what made her properly see Layfon for the first time, the him who was fighting Elrad. Perhaps she had now seen his serious expression.

"We can't let him see this, he who has just lost her."

"But."

"Ahah. I'm in the wrong too. I did what we should have done quickly. We can't not do this."

"What....."

Ignoring her question, he pulled his hand from the blade. And ignoring the pain, he shouted.

"Stop right now!"

Layfon and Elrad stopped at his shout.

"Layfon. Thank you. But this is our problem. Ignore Shena's confusion."

"But....."

Layfon wanted to say something, but he swallowed his words when he saw Sharnid's hand. Blood flowed from the pierced palm.

Sharnid ignored that and looked at his father.

"Dad, let us bet."

"On what?"

"Don't involve yourself with Dinn anymore if we win. Either way, we'll graduate in two years."

"If you lose?"

"Take him away."

"I have nothing to gain here."

"My dad is that incredible to think about this using our gamble."

"Ha," he snorted.

But the laughter in his face meant he understood it. Sharnid retrieved the gun from the ground. The injury in her hand was interfering with his movement, but he still picked up the gun.

"But you've made such a foolish choice."

"Let me live the way you can't. Father and son are copies."

"Ha, and so you want to stand out?"

"That needs courage that an adult lacks."

Sharnid's roar pressed down on Elrad.

"Ah --- it hurts."

The colour of the sunset was beautiful.

Not sure if time had flown or that he had fainted. Sharnid lay on the icy bricks, watching the sky with no pain in his body. He had wanted to keep going, but not only could he not defeat Elrad, he couldn't even use his full strength.

Perhaps because Sharnid said "us" or maybe for something totally unrelated, Dalshena had entered the fight. Still, that didn't mean much in front of Elrad's strength.

The wound in his hand had stopped bleeding. It might have become worse had the blood not stopped flowing. He hadn't taken notice of the loss of blood in the fight, but he knew it needed immediate care.

"Are you ok?" Layfon asked.

"It hurts, but I'm still alive."

He judged according to the level of pain. He had stayed in the hospital for a day, and lay on the bed for three days while exercising his Kei. The bones seemed fine, as well as his organs. In the end, Elrad had been merciful, and he had also scolded him severely.....

"..... Has he left?" Sharnid said.

Layfon was silent.

"Is that fine?"

"Never mind. You think it's not good?" he burst out. He couldn't hide things inside him, and that was why this was the truth from him.

"I wouldn't have known the results regardless of which way it goes. Then the only thing left to do was to give it my all."

He didn't know how Layfon took his words.

He sat up slowly and saw Dalshena looking at scenery beyond the outer edge of the city.

The hair painted in the gold of the sunset was beautiful. Too bright. Sharnid squinted as he watched her back.

Chapter 4: The Puzzled One

Perhaps it was an exhausting gathering, or a gathering with a purpose to bring people in one place, but it still felt like an incredible gathering. Everyone came because Layfon had to move. Layfon said they didn't have to worry about him as he had little luggage, but everyone knew he was just being polite, so they all came to help. That was because they all cared for him. He had never tried to seek comfort from them. People tried to get close to him, but he felt like something ethereal. Perhaps everyone felt the current Layfon was easier to get close to.

I'm one of them too.

Felli thought as she drank juice from the paper cup.

Even though this was a spacious living room, everyone was talking and laughing around the dishes made by Meishen. First were Layfon and Nina, then Sharnid and Harley, then Naruki, Mifi and Meishen, and at last Claribel joined in too. Laughter filled the living room. Felli hadn't been in such a bustling atmosphere, but she seemed to like it.

"Even so, this house is quite good," Harley said, looking around.

"The rent really is tempting considering how big this place is."

"Uh, but there's nothing in its vicinity," Sharnid said. Layfon smiled sourly in reply.

"I thought so too, but think about it from another angle. This much space is just right for my research lab. The problem is the equipment. If only I could make something out of recycled materials."

Harley sank into his own thoughts.

"But isn't it just a bit too big?" Mifi said in place of Harley. To her, there was nothing in here except for the things Felli and the others brought here.

"That's difficult."

"I'll think of something after this."

"Eh, Layfon is stingy. He might just leave this place empty and not buy anything."

"But this place will be filled up in no time if we put the training equipment here," Claribel said. She hadn't returned to Grendan but had settled down in Zuellni. It seemed she had finished enrolling herself in as a new student next year. She really didn't have the intention to leave.

Felli looked at her, not understanding her real intention of becoming friends with Mifi and the others. She fought Layfon who had infiltrated Grendan. Though Claribel had her arm cut off, she didn't seem to hate Layfon for it.

"Training equipment is too expensive."

"Well, I'll help buy it and then I'll use it too."

"What!"

Claribel's words made the girls speechless, including Felli.

"It'd be great if we can hold a match here. Not many people live here. If we search around, we may find a good place for a match."

"I see," Nina said.

"What?"

"So that's the reason of your being here."

"Ah, that's right. So what?"

"Not really, but, well, for a girl to so casually enter a boy's dormitory is a bit....." Nina muttered.

"Ahah."

Nina's voice was soft but Claribel got her meaning.

"Don't worry. I quite like someone who is of the caliber to beat me."

"Ah, is it all right to say that?"

Of course not. Felli thought so but didn't say it.

Caliber that could beat her? The word "caliber" meant both characteristic and talent. Layfon didn't have the characteristics to win over a girl, but in terms of strength, he had plenty of it.

Claribel had uttered her love for Layfon through a convoluted explanation, but Nina didn't seem to notice it.

"Ah, but, how should I put it?" Layfon, standing next to the clueless Nina, smiled sourly. "I feel that I don't want to live in a house full of equipment."

"Aaa, what?"

Claribel felt troubled.

And that made Felli relieved. She realised that Meishen looked the same. She probably felt it too.

"In that case, how about I borrow this house too? I also want space to practice. How much is needed to renovate the house?"

"Renovate? Of course that's needed since I need to put heavy equipment here, and I also need the electricity for it. It's faster for me to do it then search for an expert. And then I have to include the bit of using high density and soundproof materials to separate the living room."

Harley thought again.

"Oh, this seems to be getting interesting."

Sharnid and Nina smiled icily.

"Then how about we all move over?"

"Oh, interesting indeed."

Mifi clapped, but then she was just saying so from the viewpoint of an observer.

"Mei-chan and Lay-chan are expert chefs."

"How's that different from now?"

"Idiot! If a person is different, then the atmosphere and feeling won't be the same."

Meishen listened to the conversation between Naruki and Mifi with a helpless expression while she peeked at Layfon, watching for his reaction. But Layfon was just a bit surprised by this random talk.

But it didn't feel all that bad to waste time on useless things.

"Then I'll move over too," Felli said calmly.

"Ohhh, Felli-chan is the first to cooperate," Sharnid said with a sly smile.

"Because my brother has moved out. It's too expensive to live there all by myself."

This was a lie. The rent had indeed gone up, but Felli's family had supported them financially starting from when they first rented the place. That fact hadn't changed even though Felli was living by herself. But she had no obligation to live there. Felli found it appealing to tidy up her mixed feelings here.

"Ahh....." Claribel looked at her with suspicion. That was just a quick glance but it didn't escape Felli's eyes. She seemed to be asking "You want to move over too?"

Felli didn't back off. She still kept up her indifferent countenance.

"So what do you plan to do with your current place?"

"Too bad."

"Oh."

"Besides, Serina and Leu would become very busy if the election for the Student Council goes smoothly, so I have a need to move. That dormitory would become lonely."

"No, that's a possibility, but...."

"Is that so?"

Layfon, Felli and Nina's friends from the dormitory knew a bit of it.

Nina agreed with the question.

"Ah, yes. It's true that Leu is helping the candidate Samiraya. And as the candidate for the Head of Alchemy, Serina was also put into the list."

"Ahhh, that person....."

"You seen Samiraya?"

"No, but we bumped into each other. She's energetic."

"Yes, that overwhelming presence is really incredible."

"What, so she's the same as Nina," Sharnid said. Nina didn't look happy about it.

"I'm not that desperate."

"Never mind, the person on the spot is baffled."

"What did you say?"

Nina wanted to rebut, but noticing that no one was helping her, she left the subject as it was.

"Never mind. Then why doesn't Nina move over as well?" Claribel said.

"What so?"

"So you wouldn't be lonely."

"I, I won't!"

"Aaaa, really? But I like a bustling place. Besides, I have a feeling that that place will become lonely, so that's why I want to move over."

"Really."

"So, Nina, you come too."

"..... I wonder what it'll be like after the election of the Student Council," Nina cast her gaze outside.

"Then move over after the election. Luckily, this place isn't first come first serve."

"As I said, I....."

"All right. All right."

Nina felt she couldn't refuse, but one could say that was her personality. She was always like this except when she had to make a decision. Perhaps this part of her was similar to Layfon. However, it was better that a person knew how to act in an emergency rather than feeling tense about it. And it was true that Nina and Layfon were similar when in an emergency. Either way, Nina might move over. Then Felli thought she might also have to move.

"Layfon, is it true that the houses here are empty?"

"Uh? Yes. But I heard that someone else is also moving in."

"Someone new?"

"Yes, and I don't know him."

"That's all?"

"I want to meet that person. Finally someone else is moving in. That means the manager has accepted him."

"Is that so."

One moment he was thinking about the newcomer, next he was thinking about the moving procedure.

And meanwhile.

"Then I'll move over too."

The timid voice that was almost drowned out by the surrounding voices belonged to Meishen.

Felli was surprised. Had she finally uttered her inner thought? Felli might not have it right, but it was true that she was paying a lot of attention to Meishen's words.

"Oh, Mei-chan. Do you mean it?"

".....First let's ignore whether what you said was true, but I can't move over here. It's too far away."

Her two childhood friends were also surprised by her decision.

"I think what I was considering before can be realized here."

"Ah, what?"

"Well, this place doesn't have a rule that limits what can be done here."

"What're you planning to do?"

Meishen seemed surprised by Claribel's question.

"Well, a cake shop?"

"Cake shop?"

"Cancel the contract with the restaurant and open your own big shop here."

"I see, but in that case don't we have to make huge renovations? "

"Well, we can borrow money."

"If the Student Council gives the red light, we can borrow from the bank of the Business faculty."

"Oh, there's such a thing."

Claribel took a dish of dessert made by Meishen after listening to Mifi's explanation.

"True. I'd love to try this taste no matter how much it costs."

Meishen's eyes shone at her words.

Felli felt that the time to move was drawing near.

"I'm moving."

Felli told Karian, who finally showed up at home. Surprised, he almost dropped the cup of tea.

"Eh? Wait. What's this?"

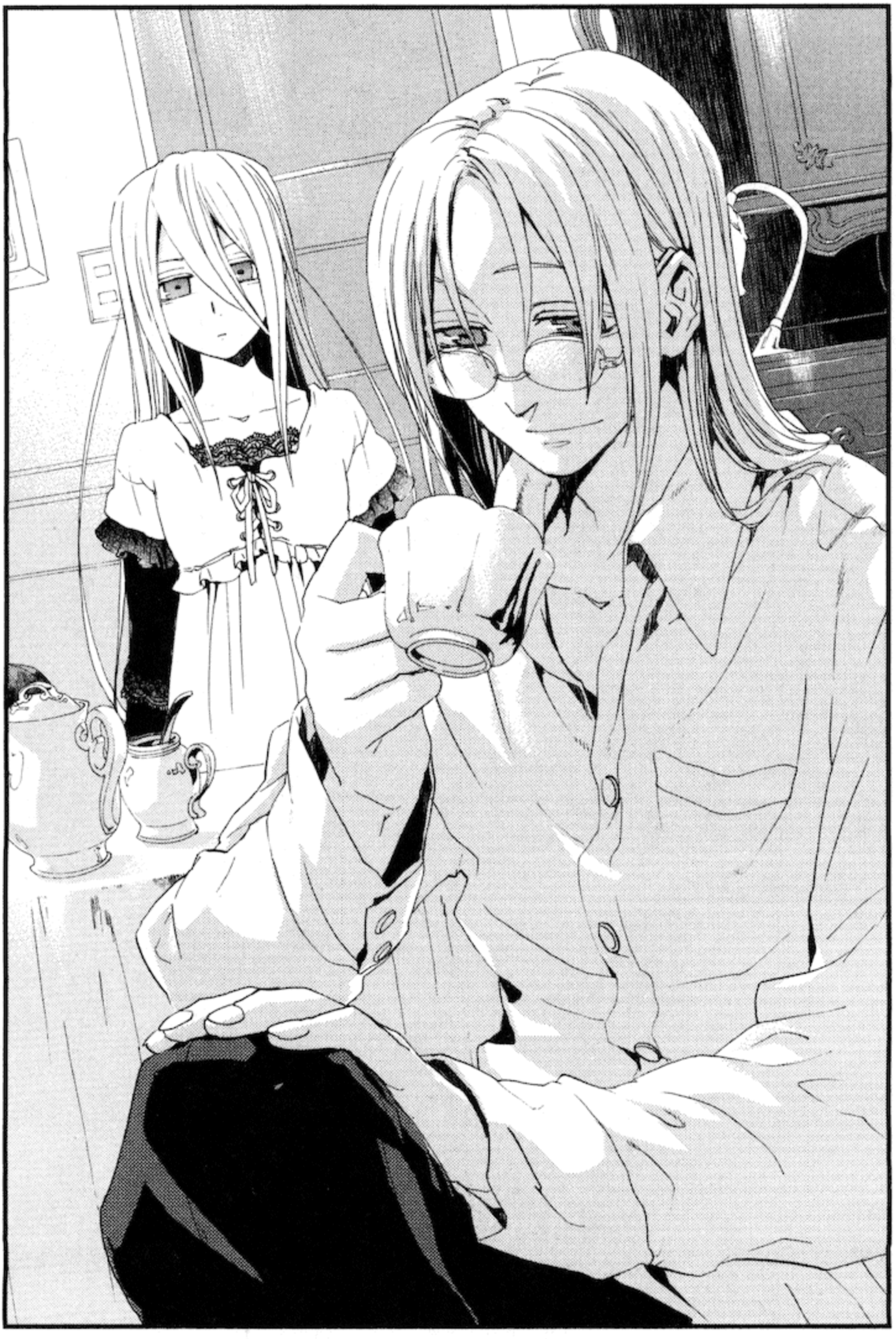
"I said I want to move."

"No. Why do you have to move? Why the necessity?"

The more reasonable Karian felt troubled by this, but Felli had no intention of elaborating. She moved away her gaze to show her stubbornness.

"Really....."

Karian took a sip and returned to the table.



"Is it Layfon?"

"This has nothing to do with Nii-san. You've graduated already. "

The simple move into the heart of the matter had somehow swayed Felli. At this time she would feel grateful that she was a Psychokinesist. Her inability to show her emotions was normally a weakness, but now it worked in her favor.

But this wouldn't work against her brother.

"Speaking of which, I did hear that Layfon had moved out of the first boys dormitory."

It didn't work at all.

".....Do you still want to interfere with him now?"

"You know I had no other choice."

He was untouched by her angry gaze.

"We had many conflicts, but in the end he did it as I said. And as a result Zuellni managed to avert the bad ending of possessing zero selenium mines. Right I don't want to ask him to do anything as a Student President. Besides I don't have the time for it."

"....."

"And that's the same for you."

"Eh?"

"I think I've said it before. Since my power is about to disappear , you have no more reason to stay in Military Arts. There's no immediate danger at the moment. You can tell from the current candidates. The Student President will announce the name of the next president in the Military Arts Competition that is to be held the year after. In that case it's not possible to let you transfer to General Studies for a year and then back to Military Arts."

"What if I am denied the right to transfer?"

"You won't know if you don't try it."

Karian half closed his eyes at her suspicion, feeling bitter.

"Either way, that's something you have to take care of. When you meet a situation that requires a decision, that decision must come from you."

"Well....."

"Whose understanding and help do I want so we can confront the problem together. But that person is alone from the beginning. Even the helper has to be decided on by oneself. And even if someone did give her an opinion, that person has to decide on whether to take that advice or not."

"..... Just what are you trying to say?"

"If you only think of defeat, you'll have nothing in the end. And what is left is your sad self. Is that why you are here with that kind of thinking?"

A shock. Karian didn't move.

"About transferring, that's the only suggestion I have for you."

"Suggestion? That?"

"Yes, the older brother's suggestion for his sister. In truth, that's the suggestion for you about living on your own."

"And so you mean?"

"Of course I want you to stay because the security of this place is good. Though it is a short time, no one would force you if you want to live by yourself in Zuellni."

"Then why didn't you just say so?"

"You're too hard. You never gave me a chance to speak," Karian smiled.

"That was none of your business."

She wondered when she started getting angry while looking at her happy brother. Though he seemed like he was faking his smile, he had never really revealed his inner thoughts like now. At least this was Felli's first time seeing it after they came to Zuellni.

"So what about that?"

"Is there anything else?"

Karian continued without the effort of feeling surprised. "Yes. A lot more. A lot more, but I'm not used to saying this for the first time. It's not a meaningful thing to the elder brother when his sister is attracted by a man. But that's just my wish as a brother. Either way, the problem involves Layfon and you."

"What problem?"

"Do you think you can win?"

Felli's face heated at such a direct question. She didn't know if the anger was shown on her face, but she did feel angry. No, she was so angry that she didn't even feel angry.

"You can tell by observing him that he's got something else in mind. I told you already."

"So what?"

"How should I put it? Um. He's that kind of a person. Rather than saying he moved according to my prediction after being transferred to Military Arts, he acted because of the attraction from Nina Antalk's strong determination."

Felli knew of that.

"Layfon is like that. He was injured in the earlier commotion. How did he heal?"

".....Nii-san!"

"What happened about that? I can't investigate if you don't tell me anything."

"....."

"But I can guess. Leerin Marfes didn't return, and Layfon looks very down. If that's true, then I can guess Layfon is part of it."

Felli took in a deep breath. Perhaps it was just as he said. Though she didn't say it, she felt the 17th platoon and people who came close to Layfon could sense it.

No, even if she had chosen to stay in Grendan herself, Layfon wouldn't have been pushed to a corner if she and he had talked about it.

It was really tragic.

The Layfon whom Claribel dragged back seemed like he had lost his soul.

When Felli saw him at the connecting bridge, his expression made her back go cold. She had feared he was dead. Even Felli understood how much pain he suffered.

And she could understand a bit of Leerin's feeling.

Layfon liked Leerin. That was because she was the first female he knew. Felli would say this from her own standpoint. The first

female whom Layfon met and was about his age was Leerin. She was gentle like a mother, strong, kind and beautiful. And she was always close to him. It was impossible for Layfon to understand other girls with Leerin beside him. He was used to liking her and she liking him, but he hadn't experienced romance. He didn't have the feeling of a romantic fairytale. And that was why he was so slow.

But Leerin was the first to realize her own feeling. And that was the time when everything collapsed.

Perhaps Layfon finally realized his own feeling when he last saw Leerin, when she refused him. That must be it. He realized that he loved her, but it was too late. Leerin knew everything but she decided to leave him. Perhaps Layfon didn't notice it in the last moment. That was why words couldn't describe it.

He had lost half of his body.

Romance must be accepted by the other half. And the two of them were like one existence. The two of them grew up together in the orphanage, and they must be like one body.

To love Leerin. He must accept the fact that Leerin was another person. What would that feel like? For someone who had no such experience, Leerin had no way to comprehending it. And so she didn't know what being dumped was like.

And Layfon showed such an expression after the assault of overlapping events, romance and being dumped.

"If I say his action in Zuellni was based on Nina Antalk, then his action in Grendan was based on Leerin Marfes," Karian said to the speechless Felli. "Though what Layfon did in Grendan wasn't what Leerin had wanted, he definitely kept fighting to make her wish come true. Not during the time at the orphanage. No. I can't totally deny that period of time. But it shouldn't be wrong to guess that Leerin makes up a large part of the reason that he keeps fighting."

That was probably why it felt like the two of them had the same heart and body. But. But..... he was rejected by Leerin. The Layfon who chased after her to Grendan. And in the end, in the end, Leerin, who had wanted to prove they were one heart and body, rejected him. She said she had a reason. What was it?

No matter what reason it was, Layfon would take it up upon himself and blamed himself for it.

Leerin had that mental preparation too.

"You want him to recover."

"I....."

"Sadness can diminish through time. But is it good for him to become his original self?"

"....."

Felli once again had no words for him as she comprehended her brother's meaning.

"The scariness of his uneasiness," Karian said curtly. "He has that power, but he has no reason to fight. He leaves his reason to someone else. Even if he returns to his old self, would he continue to rely on Nina Antalk? But that's just one ending. Why did I say it, because she....."

"..... ? Nii-san?"

"No. That's quite good."

Karian stopped thinking of the harder question and shook his head. "The problem is still Layfon's. I've said many times already. He must stand on his own two feet. He must judge with his own values. Otherwise, he'll head for his own destruction in the near future."

"Eh?"

"Remember, Felli. The man you like is this kind of a person. And so what should you do?"

"That is?"

"What can you do for him?"

Felli couldn't reply.

Karian looked at her with a serious expression.

Her heart became a mess.

Why. Why. Why did they turn the situation into such a deep topic? Oh, because it was related to Layfon. True. If Layfon's personality remained unchanged, the same thing would happen again. But why did Karian have to talk about this?

"Nii-san....."

This had nothing to do with him. Felli wanted to say it just when she was a sense of bitterness in his harsh gaze.

"Ah, but, this isn't a problem that can be solved right now. A person's personality doesn't change that easily."

"..... If that's the case, why tell me this?"

"I'm saying the same thing would repeat itself if this problem is ignored. Don't you have to be more careful if you're to win and continue to be with him?"

"Win?"

"Romance is also a fight."

That was a possibility, but Felli wasn't happy to be told that.

"The problem is just at what level is it the best? That's the key. Obtaining isn't the same as winning. This isn't the same as the usual winning and losing, so it's difficult."

Felli showed her understanding, but she was still angry at her nodding brother.

"Anyway, the first thing is to move."

"Uh, this decision can't be changed. I said it already, I can't change your decision to live on your own from next year on."

Felli agreed furiously.

"But I'll help you one last time with all my might."

"Ha?"

"But I can't guarantee success."

Karian showed the expression of a teenager about to do something naughty. Felli genuinely felt the nostalgic relaxed feel from him when he first came to Zuellni.

With no money to move house and that training was canceled because the Training Complex was undergoing renovation, this time could be used to earn some money.

She didn't expect him to accept her job invite.

The two of them were in the library of the Student Council.

"Are you dissatisfied with something?"

"Ah? No. Not at all."

Layfon, who was being stared at, kept shaking his head.

"Then let's do it."

"No..... For Felli to work, that's rare."

Layfon knew she had never worked before. Though she had worked in the café before, he had never heard of her working somewhere else. He was surprised that she invited him to work.

"Since I have more time from next year onwards."

"Ah?"

Felli's gaze turned to the machine before her.

Layfon's job was to tidy up the books of the Student Council. It wasn't just about organizing the documents. He had to label the documents by codes and put them in the correct order. They had to scan the codes of the books. If the number of books in demand wasn't large, no one would bother with this type of work.

This was for the convenience of students who could keep the books temporarily with their names on it. In here were the two scanners and the packs of books piling on top of each other like a small mountain.

"Seems it'll take some time."

"The Student Council is unexpectedly messy."

It wouldn't be so messy if the books were organized regularly. But in here were large numbers of boxes. The more one found it difficult to breathe here, the smaller the room seemed to be.

"Let's hurry up with this."

"Right."

Layfon nodded and moved the nearby box to between the two of them. One box was very heavy. If Felli did this alone, it'd be weight training for her. Maybe that was why she invited him over. They took out the books one by one and scanned them. Layfon stuffed the paper into the scanner. Once it was confirmed scanned, he then put it back into the box.

They labeled a box "Done" and then put it in a corner.

They repeated this motion again and again.

"....."

"....."

Silently repeating.

"Speaking of which, just then....."

"What?"

Layfon began to lose his impatience in the room with only the sound of the scanner.

"Just then you said you have time from next year onwards....."

"Yes. I said so."

"What do you mean?"

"You mean?"

"Ah, sorry....."

Felli sighed at his hurried apology.

"No. It isn't as you think."

"Uh?"

"Even if I don't say it, you'd understand."

"....."

"You don't get it."

"I'm sorry."

Being glared at once more, Layfon lowered his head. She sighed again. He decided he must relax this time.

"The Military Competition has ended and my brother is about to graduate."

"Yes."

"The danger Zuellni faced was gone. In that case, I have no reason to stay in Military Arts."

"Ah."

"I already told you of my reason being here, didn't I?"

"Yes....."

"I want to know what I can do besides being a Military Artist. This is my goal, and so I'm thinking of exploring it seriously next year. I don't yet know if they would let me transfer to General Studies, but at least I want to leave the platoon."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

Layfon nodded without hesitation. He didn't say anything else. He knew he probably wasn't needed in the platoon anymore. Sometimes he had had this thought recently. But he was a bit shocked and jealous of Felli who always put others before her own interest.

"But....."

"What is it?"

"Nothing. What are you planning to do next?"

"I....."

He didn't continue with the topic. She felt he was spacing out.

"..... What about the captain?"

"Why would the captain appear in this conversation?"

"Speaking of which..... It'd be bad if Felli leaves the platoon."

"They can just find another Psychokinesist."

"If it's one who can replace Felli....."

"There is one."

Layfon found that each reply made the atmosphere colder, so he had no words to say.

Silence. Only time passed.

Felli was angry. That seemed to be it. He knew why she was angry, because he wasn't answering clearly.

(Should I give up being a Military Artist?)

This question floated in his mind. He couldn't forget it. He was thinking of his future when Felli asked him. Should he continue to be a Military Artist or give it up? Either way, he couldn't see his future. He came to Zuellni just when he wanted to give it up. But he had become a Military Artist to enter the fight. He found a job to kill time, but he still hadn't found his goal.

Could he give it up in this situation? He had such thinking but he was still hesitant.

"..... Tsk."

He swallowed the sound of self-mockery that burst out of his mouth. Layfon tried to control his emotions in this room filled with the sound of the scanner. He scanned the books, and this way , the words on the page would not be lost. They would be saved in a place narrower than the thickness of a piece of paper.

He still couldn't find the answer as he repeated the motion.

He wanted to know what he was doing, but his hands didn't stop working. The boxes labeled "Done" continued to pile up. Layfon put the new boxes between him and Felli.

"Let's take a break," Felli said. They had worked for a long time.

When he came to, he realized that the labeled boxes around him were accumulating. They had finished one third of the boxes already.

"Right," he nodded, still spacing out.

The two of them sat on a long bench in the reception room that was in the same building as the Student Council. In their hands were carton of juice. Layfon was silent, and so was Felli.

The receptionists were doing their work, helping the students with their procedures. There were a few books here, and so Layfon decided to bring them in to be organized too.

While they were thinking, a worker wearing a uniform walked past them. She stopped in front of the vending machine and then left.

"Hello."

The girl stopped in front of Layfon.

"?....."

"Still the same gloomy face?"

It was Samiraya.

"Senpai....."

Layfon was pointing at her uniform. Samiraya pointed at the name tag. "I work here, don't you know?"

"Yeah."

"Humph. Never mind. It's public news and you still don't know ? Never mind."

It still looked like she was scolding him for not being concerned with the election.

"Sorry."

"No problem. Speaking of which, are you the younger sister of the Student President?"

"Hello."

Samiraya didn't notice Felli's impatient greeting, let alone the changes in her expression. But at least they had now gotten acquainted.

"It's not strange to see you two together as you're both in the 17th platoon. But what're you doing here?"

"It's work."

"Work?"

"To scan the books."

"Ah. Thanks for the work."

Had she lost interest in them? She made an "all the best" gesture and then left.

"When did you get to know her?"

"Ah? It was by chance."

"Uh."

He felt she wasn't as interested in her conversation. It must be that she was still angry. That couldn't be helped since he was at fault for not answering her.

Just like then.

They had almost finished their juice. There wasn't much to do. They went back to the library.

Something unexpected happened on their way back.

Samiraya was resting on the stairs.

"........? What is it?"

She blinked at them meaningfully. They looked up and saw a woman crying. Not just one, but two women were crying and comforting each other.

"They belong to the Administration Department," Samiraya said .

"Quick. Hurry and hide."

"Quick," she said, took hold of Layfon's uniform and pulled him down the stairs.

"Can still gain some time."

Samiraya bent down as she went down the stairs. Layfon and Felli followed.

"Is something wrong?"

"It's not like that."

"Then.....?"

"Uh, you're still juniors so you can't find that sense of reality..... after graduation."

"Ah?"

"For example, best friends. You may be separated from them, or you could be in different fields. It may not be like that, but don't you think you'll be lonely?"

He remembered. Samiraya had said the same thing before, and he agreed with her. His thoughts began to race as he thought of what Samiraya was thinking of at that time. What she wanted to obtain. He seemed to know little about her. But he now clearly remembered what she said at that time. Because that scene gave him intense pain.

He wouldn't be able to stay in Zuellni. He couldn't see it anymore, and that was the same as death.

Leerin had probably already died in him. If he could only see her in memories, then wasn't this the same as dying for real? In that case, he could return to Grendan. He could see Leerin again. When he received the katana from his father, he had thought of the possibility of returning to Grendan. Return to Grendan. Return to the orphanage. Everything returned to how it was originally..... Even though he couldn't hold the Heaven's Blade again, he could return to the daily life of the orphanage, of Grendan with Leerin and his father, with Toby, Henrietta, Henry and the other children.

But it wasn't possible.

That must be it.

He still couldn't see the future even now. Just like the time when he first came to Zuellni. Why was that so? Darkness was in front of him. There was no light.

"But that can't be helped," Felli said.

"True," Samiraya nodded. "I already knew when I came to Zuellni. With entrance comes graduation. The fact of leaving good friends can't be changed."

"Yes."

"This is what it's like here. Six years is a short time in human life . But then six years aren't all that short. We can still treasure it. The six years here are good. We can meet many good friends in this time, and so these six years are very important for us."

"I feel pain for talking about people I can't meet anymore."

Samiraya stood up quickly and looked up to hide the tears in her eyes.

The two women seemed to have left already.

"Then let us get back to work."

Samiraya turned around. She looked a bit embarrassed.

Layfon and Felli returned to the library and continued the dry work. Though they were thinking of what just happened, their

hands didn't stop. The work here was very different from that in the Mechanical Department. It didn't involve the whole body, and so the work seemed very tiring. They couldn't say much but they felt uncomfortable somewhere deep inside them. Impatience. And that was probably why the books had been piling up in here.

"Just then....."

Layfon put a box between them again and said "When was it?"

Felli's reply was sharp and icy, "Before our break."

"Oh. In truth, even I don't know what I should do. It's fine if I don't continue down the path of a Military Artist. What I mean is sometimes I may think can I give up being a Military Artist? I can finish carrying out the Student President's order, but that's not important anymore."

"I don't know if I can win against other Psychokinesists on my own."

"Uh?"

"I feel frustrated at losing when I feel confident about my Psychokinesis. It would be quite serious if I were in Grendan."

Fermaus' interference had rendered Felli immobile when she was taken hostage by the Salinvan Mercenary Gang. Not only that. She had failed when facing the other Psychokinesist at the time of the match against the 1st platoon. And though it took a lot of her effort to face against Delbone, she was quickly defeated.

The most important thing was Delbone had counted on her before she died.

Delbone was a stranger, a old woman to Felli, but she couldn't ignore the importance of what was entrusted to her.

"I don't hate people having expectations on me. I just don't like not being disliked when I first entered the academy as a Psychokinesist, and I hadn't thought of slacking off in my studies," Felli said as she continued to scan the books. When they finished, the two of them changed other books.

"Though my original goal is no more, I still hate not having completed it."

Felli was right. Layfon had nothing to say.

"You don't really think about the platoon and the captain. All you're doing is simply following the captain without thinking, isn't it?"

Felli appeared to be questioning him.

Layfon's mind was blank. Something was rapidly expanding, preventing the only words that could retort against her. He desperately tried to stop that thing bursting from deep in his heart. He was obviously looking away from Felli's face but his concentration had inevitably gone to his thoughts.

"I'm sorry for speaking too much," Felli said.

"Not at all....."

Layfon concentrated on physical labour to hide the constriction of his throat. He continued to organize the books. Perhaps another problem would appear before him, and perhaps he would ignore it like now. The problems would keep coming one after another. It was useless to repeatedly run away from it, running oneself to exhaustion.

"Please remember. Whether it's me or the captain, we'll both leave this city before you."

Felli hadn't said anything till they finished organising the books .

And Layfon didn't remember anything else.

Seeing the two blurry figures passing by the window of the room of the Student President, Karian sank into deep thought.

"I wonder if it went well with her."

He meant the distance between the two. Karian sighed, understanding his sister's feeling. But things needed to be calmly confronted. They wouldn't have finished the job already. Was their distance shrinking or widening? That might be a thing of the future though.

She wasn't wishing for the light interaction that would never cause a quarrel. That was why she had to confront the side of him

that she didn't like. Either way, she wanted him to change, and so confrontation was natural. If Felli couldn't overcome this crisis, then there was no other way.

This distance would cause a quarrel. What would happen next? Problems would keep popping up.

Layfon knew Grendan well.

"Next..... To stand up against him again or continue to....."

Karian didn't say this because of his sister.

"Who knows? Even one person is wanted, though she isn't alone in this world."

It was rare to see Karian alone in the Student President's room. Though he knew his words that he wasn't talking about himself.

"The crisis of this world is about to arrive."

Did anyone know? What would the people of Grendan do? Temporarily passing through the crisis, the people there were saving their energy for the next fight. That city was such a place, and Karian had finally understood it.

That city was born to fight against the crisis of this world. This was the truth.

But was it fine to entrust the fate of millions of people to that one city? Even though that city was the most trained place, was it enough to be entrusted with the future of this world? Was it fine to

be entrusted with the future while everyone else knew nothing about this and kept on living? If Grendan was defeated, everyone in this world would die without knowing anything.

Was this really fine?

But maybe the chaos would be inevitable. Since each Regios survived on its own, the chaos would not immediately spread to other cities. Perhaps this could save the world. But because of the chaos, some cities would still disappear.

What Karian was to do next might be to trigger the chaos. He had had enough of being controlled by fate, of waiting for the result.

He finally knew.

He saw the face of Grendan through the Electronic Fairy Zuellni on that day in the center of the Mechanical Department. And it was able to appear in between the cracks.....

".....I can't be entrusted with fate yet because I'm still a child ?"

Keeping his emotions calm while mocking himself, Karian left from the window.

This was what happened at that night.

He looked at the spacious room he was in with relaxed feeling as someone knocked on his door.

Not the door of the room, and not in the corridor of the house, but right before the proper entrance of the house.

He opened the door and saw Dalshena.

"Dalshena senpai?"

Layfon was puzzled that she decided to visit at this hour.

"Uh....."

"I'm just passing by on my way to the dormitory."

"Aaaa."

"Um, let's come inside first."

He was confused as to why she was here. Besides, she looked tired. No. She looked as if she was beaten..... That kind of a feeling.

Layfon took a step back from the entrance and she entered. He closed the door.

"Take a sit on the sofa and have a cup of tea."

There was just one sofa in the living room. Layfon ran to the kitchen to prepare the tea. There was still a lot of tea left. Meishen had brought it over when she helped him move. Layfon kept his attention on the sound of boiling water while he pondered the question.

Dalshena sat down helplessly on the sofa. She didn't glance at him. She gazed at the curtain of the living room, presenting a back figure that made one's heart ache. It wasn't caused by physical blows. Layfon immediately rejected such a terrible suspicion.

The tea was ready. He put it on the small table in front of the sofa.

"Senpai."

"Ah, thanks," Dalshena said in a soft voice. Not sure whether to sit beside her, Layfon sat down on the floor. Dalshena didn't touch the tea cup. She was just staring at the steam rising from the cup.

Layfon didn't know what to say. Time passed by quietly. He looked at her and felt a bit afraid, so he didn't reach out for the cup too.

".....I have a favor to ask."

Dalshena said after a few moments of struggle.

"I have to say something unbecoming."

".....Senpai?"

Though she had been addressed, Dalshena didn't look at him.

"I can't not say these cowardly words. But I myself don't know what to do. I can't do anything. There's too much difference in our strength. And I don't even know how much of a difference it is. But, but....."

Layfon felt she was very shocked, too shocked to say anything more. She was like a balloon leaking air. She kept panting and not saying a word.

But, she still had to continue.

Perhaps this was the difference between her and Layfon. She would listen and then think about the next step. Not just her, but others, like Nina, Shanrid, Felli, Harley, Kiriku, Karian, Gorneo. Perhaps everyone was like that.

"I can't step back. Can't step back. Perhaps this is obvious. I don't want them to take Dinn away."

That night, Layfon went to Harley's home. He didn't want to regret anything. He wanted to do what he could do. And then he stopped.

There was a roaming bus and many guards on the outer-edge. They were surrounding Dinn, who was sitting in a wheelchair.

They were Military Artists with some power.

Sharnid was surprised.

"Damn!"

She didn't hear Sharnid's call. Perhaps Dalshena could make a reply but she wasn't interested anymore. She must defeat the Military Artists before her. Layfon didn't expect them to be of such level. He wasn't scared but he must not let his guard down. Layfon readied his fighting stance, and the Military Artist Elrad restored his Dite.

Two guns. It was combat with guns. Layfon's mind reacted immediately. Elrad's presence had vanished, his figure too, and then he reappeared. It was Sakkei. Layfon evaded the bullets and continued evading as he restored the Sapphire Dite to its Steel Thread mode. He pulled out the Shim Adamantium Dite and restored it. He finished laying out the steel threads to block the bullets. In order to watch his opponent's moves clearly, Layfon chose not to stay in his spot.

"Good. What a scary guy."

Sound suddenly entered his ears.

Perhaps this came from a gap. The presence was elsewhere. Layfon's gaze followed.

"Humph, not cute at all. Never mind."

The voice continued. Layfon knew what technique it was now.

The steel threads were conveying the voice to him. His opponent was using this technique to confuse his senses.

"If I were to fight you, I'll die terribly. How about it? Want a truce?"

"What do you want me to do?"

"I'm asking for a favor. I have to keep it from my son since I have an obligation to the requester. I can't pretend not to know."

"Son?"

"Didn't hear? The guy being beaten is my son."

Layfon didn't move his gaze. But if he was to take notice of the outside world, he'd notice the sound of a fight that differed from his own.

Sharnid was fighting with Dalshena.

It was about Dinn too, but Sharnid thought differently, and so this became a fight. The scene was similar to that of the platoon match against the 10th platoon.

But had Sharnid thought of not wanting Dinn to leave? Or had he already given up? Layfon didn't understand. He had no time to ask Sharnid.

Besides, Layfon had decided.

"Can I not take Dinn senpai?"

"Is your action right?"

For a split second, Layfon regretted asking the question directly.

"I've already decided."

"You're really stubborn. But you can't say 'I'm the same'".

"Then....."

Elrad kept talking as if he was drowning him out.

"I have feelings. I asked someone to draw a portrait of my son's mother."

"Um."

"I don't know if that was the only thing I did for her. In the end, I still couldn't tell him that."

The bullets turned intense. Layfon was forced to move. His opponent knew how to interfere with his Steel Threads. And his voice could reach Layfon. Elrad probably had thought about it before acting.

But how was he to act?

No. Could he act?

This wasn't a problem to do with the war, and not a problem with Elrad's strength either.

Layfon's opponent was Elrad, who had declared he wouldn't back off from this fight. Layfon didn't know how to react to it.

Overlapped. The figure seemed to resemble Elrad, yet at the same time, it seemed not. But that figure didn't disappear from Layfon's mind.

(I'm lost again.....)

Was Layfon repeating the same thing? He still couldn't do anything. Was he back to his starting point?

Couldn't he face it?

What floated up in his mind turned to be fear.

(This kind of thing.....)

It wouldn't do. It wouldn't do to be like this again. And that was why Layfon kept moving forward. Since the Steel Threads were being interfered with, they didn't move all that well in his hand. But Elrad didn't turn from defense to attack and assault Layfon directly. And so Layfon couldn't make up his mind to use his full strength at a critical moment, and that was how he kept moving with the Steel Threads spread out around him.

But, but..... why was Elrad here?

Sharnid's father.

Repeating a similar situation had thrown Layfon off his track.

Not wanting to lose Dinn. This should be Sharnid and Dalshena's thinking. But Sharnid looked as if he would give up at some point in time. Layfon, who stood here without knowing the situation, couldn't understand what Sharnid was thinking.

(I could have just asked for the details.)

It was too late to regret that now. Yes, everything was too late. Layfon was slow in reaction no matter what, and he just couldn't understand the situation properly. Everything happened away from him. If he took notice of it he would get involved.

It had always been like that since coming to Zuellni. Or perhaps he was like that too before he came to Zuellni.

(Haha, maybe I'm really useless.)

His role as a Military Artist was determined from his birth. With that as his starting point, he had lived by imitating Military Artists, and then he came to the Academy City. Of course there were troubles on the way, and so his way of thinking differed from that of a normal Military Artist. But while thinking of what he could do, all he did was move like a normal Military Artist.

He lost in one of those things. Not just as a Military Artist, he had even lost his reason as one. He was a true loser, living without purpose. That was the present him.

Everyone told him this wouldn't do. Karian had said it to him. Felli said so a few days ago.

(I can't be like this.)

He felt he already comprehended the problem a long time ago.

(But I don't know what to do.)

And it was the same right now.

He came here, influenced by Dalshena's persuasive stubbornness, but now he was also affected by Elrad's words. His feet kept moving as the Steel Threads blocked off the bullets.

(What should I do..... What should I do.....)

Why was he so confused? Didn't he decide on what to do when he left with Dalshena? He didn't care what was right as he listened to her. Had her tears overlapped with his thinking? It would have been too late when one realized he didn't want to lose that someone. Wouldn't anyone want understanding?

Then why couldn't Layfon move forward?

It'd be good if he could just move forward.

If he could move forward.

If he could move forward.

"Stop right now!"

And then he heard Sharnid's shout. Sharnid had been injured by Dalshena, his hand bled as he shouted at Layfon and Elrad. Layfon would not be able to make a face like his.

What happened afterwards was a blur to him. He was completely lost. Time had already slipped away when he came to. The Sharnid, who challenged Elrad, had fallen. Dalshena, who joined the fight, had also fallen. Only Elrad was left standing.

"Really."

Fully exhausted, Elrad looked at Layfon.

"There shouldn't be a need to fight you now, should there?"

As if he was confirming it, saying it in an unbelievably pleading tone. Exhaustion and satisfaction overlapped. But, but maybe it was all an illusion. Perhaps he was just tired. Perhaps there were other feelings mixed in it. Or perhaps this was just reflecting a man's personality.

Layfon didn't answer.

No, he had no answer for him.

Elrad turned around without asking for the reply, and headed for another place.

Speaking of the which, the wind opposite the outer-edge was very fierce just then, but now it had completely ceased. A roaming bus could leave in this weather.

The engine of the roaming bus started. The Dinn sitting in the wheelchair was taken away. Dinn's gaze had never once turned to Sharnid.

Realising this, Layfon felt very lonely. Though Dinn wasn't thinking of anything, was this fine to do nothing to the unconscious Sharnid and Dalshena? The two of them didn't want Dinn to leave and had fought up till now.

"Hey, it's stopped," Elrad said without turning around. Layfon wasn't sure if he had noticed his presence.

"You've already done what she wanted. It's redundant to do anything more. A waste. A waste."

"But....."

Was it because Elrad was one step ahead of him? Tension, fighting spirit and such. None of these rushed to Layfon's mind. What was left were just questions. So did he not have to continue with this? Remaining behind was anxiety.

The feeling remained.

"Those two should know clearly. That brat won't recover by staying here. You understand? I'm saying this because understanding and accepting aren't the same."

Layfon didn't even know this. Elrad turned around and frowned at him.

"It wasn't easy for you either."

Sympathy.

Elrad didn't give him time to react. He turned around and ran for the roaming bus.

"Greet him for me when he wakes up," Elrad said and walked up the spiral staircase that had taken Dinn away.

After that, Dalshena was the first to wake up. Could those two not ask him what had happened afterwards? Layfon lowered his head and then ran to the tip of the outer-edge, but he could no longer see the roaming bus.

Sharnid also came to.

"Have they left?" he said quietly with a lonely smile.

"Is this fine?"

For it to come to this.

They couldn't make Dinn stay. He was obviously troubled by it originally. He was like that when he helped Layfon move house. But he was laughing like usual and making Nina and Felli mad, giving off the feel of his usual self.

He was smiling but he should felt troubled. Layfon wondered if he himself could be like him. Probably not.

"I don't know what happened at that time when I fell. Isn't it easier for me from now on then?" Sharnid said.

Layfon didn't feel anything deeper than the surface meaning of his words. He could only move forward without hesitation. He acted for the sake of his conclusion. He could only try regardless of success or failure. This procedure was known, and Layfon could feel the logic behind it.

But, he didn't understand.

Layfon didn't understand. Was it all right to accept it? He couldn't see Leerin again. Could he accept this reality?

Because he couldn't acknowledge it, because he couldn't accept the reality, that's why he couldn't let go of what he had lost at that time?

After taking the injured Sharnid and Dalshena to the hospital, Layfon headed alone for his house.

That night, with a tired look that was so unlike her, watching him leave the hospital, Dalshena didn't look frustrated. Though she was lonely, though she was spent, she didn't look gloomy. Perhaps she had cried on her own and so she wasn't beaten down by failure. Dalshena had already accepted the reality.

Just what was this?

Could she accept it if she had acted?

Could she accept this reality if she had acted?

Layfon had acted too. He had infiltrated Grendan to save Leerin . His sister had persuaded him not to go. His foster father had blocked his way. He had fought a fight he didn't want. He had repeatedly experienced his thinking and had finally reached her, but Leerin had rejected him.

He had done everything he could.

Even so, he didn't let go.

Why.....?

He pondered as he walked. There was plenty of time for him to walk back. The sun had set, and no one would like to stroll on the outer-edge, and so Layfon walked alone in this atmosphere. It was right for him to move to the storage area. It took him longer to walk back. He might turn crazy if he returned too early to a house that only he himself lived in.

But even spending a long time thinking of the same thing only brought him back to the original spot.

Layfon stopped walking a number of times to breathe in deeply. He didn't know where he would run off to if he didn't do this. Maybe he just couldn't stop. Besides, he had never thought of a conclusion like Sharnid's, experiencing this tragedy but without feeling doubt.

Though his feet had now stopped, he still felt he was in an unfamiliar place. He staggered into the house.

Dissatisfaction and troubled feeling continued to assault him. But he didn't stop moving.

It took him a long time to come back to the house. The problem of easing his hunger surfaced in his mind, but he didn't even have the mood to stand alone in the kitchen. He just thought of going to sleep.

The building wasn't that big, but he was the only person here. It lacked people. And this atmosphere made him feel heavier. He no longer felt the excitement he had when he moved house.

Next was to sleep, but he didn't know when he could sleep. In truth, he had never slept since moving in. He hadn't even had a dream. He was always waking up when he was about to fall asleep .

Felli stood in front of his house.

It took a while for him to feel shocked when he saw her. "Felli..... .....?"

"What're you doing?" she said angrily, glaring at him.

"I....."

"I heard you didn't go to work but had come straight home."

"Uh, uh, I'm sorry."

Why? The image of the Steel Threads came to him before she asked him. Harley had unsealed the Dite even though he knew nothing. Was this why Felli was here?

Had anything happened?

But if that was the case, Nina should be here too?

"Anyway, let's go inside. It's cold out here."

"I'm sorry for intruding."

Layfon entered the house and went to boil the water. Felli took out the tea bags that Dalshena had brought over before, and waited for the water to boil.

She sat on the sofa, her hands tightly holding the tea cup, feeling its warmth.

First was Dalshena, then Felli. Just what was going on? He quietly watched her.

"Uh, I'll leave this here," Felli finally said after drinking half of the tea in her cup. She opened her bag and took out a letter. "This is from the head of the male dorm. It seems to have arrived late, after you took care of the moving out procedure."

He opened the envelope. The letter looked old. Its appearance showed its long journey to here. A bad feeling came to him which made him hesitate to read at the words on the envelope. But he ended up reading it. It was not the address of the male dorm that

he had a bad feeling about. He turned over the letter with a feeling of unease and hope.

On it were the names of three people. Toby, Henrietta and Henry.

"I'm not saying you've to return to the past," Felli said and put her tea cup to her lips. Her gaze fell on the curtains.

An intense feeling rolled over Layfon. Outside was a storm, intense wind blew outside the Aurora Field. Mixed with the wind was a high density of pollutants. The wind swept up the sand from the dry earth, making its surrounding a blur. Nothing could be seen.

What awaited after the wind had ceased was a clean sky.

Deep inside his throat, there was a vibration. Just what was written on the letter? He didn't know as he hadn't read it yet. What did it mean to see those three words? Even he himself didn't know, just like the mad storm blowing inside him.

It was this intense, destroying that thing deep in his heart and sweeping it up to the sky.

(Ah, really.)

Everything was out in the open.

"I'm sorry."

"It's fine. I don't mind."

No, it wasn't like this. He had replied and fixed the error. Being able to do this was already good enough for him.

"Fon Fon.....?"

Ah, she called him like that again.

He was looked down lightly in the library, but now.....

"Would it be good to get discouraged now?"

Ah.

He knew there was a thing he had to do first. He couldn't leave the books alone in the library and let them keep piling up. That was it.

Layfon didn't even know what kind of expression Felli had now .

Something deep in his throat.

But now he had many things to say.

What was painful, what was regrettable, what was unbecoming, what was sad, what was glad, what was embarrassing. Everything. The things Layfon Alseif knew and didn't, the things he changed so as to understand. In order to speak the first word that would let him say it all, Layfon sobbed.

Chapter 5: Ones in Discord

She realized she was in a space unfamiliar to her.

No.

She just hadn't gotten used to it. She had seen that sunroof many times already. This was the feeling she had. She opened her eyes, lying on the richly decorated, luxurious bed. Leerin knew she was awake.

"..... Uh."

She confirmed the time and showed a bitter smile.

At this usual hour she would be making breakfast, but now there was no need. There were people to prepare meals and to do chores here, people who were here to look after her.

Though they were poor, there were people employed here who weren't part of the royal family.

That wasn't because the family of Eutnohl was one of the three royal families. The current head of Eutnohl, Minse Eutnohl, wasn't a Heaven's Blade successor, but Leerin knew from the Head Maid that he was active in commanding the Military Artists in the battles against filth monsters.

Ordinary people wouldn't be able to see a fight against filth monsters. Ordinary people would talk and compare Military Artists with music, movies or the heroes in magazines. For

example, who was the most active in the last battle? The battle between the aged phase filth monster and the Heaven's Blade successors.

Not that Leerin held no interest in those topics, but she wouldn't actively seek them out, and so she hadn't heard of Minse's name there.

"There are still many with great fighting strength."

Leerin was an ordinary person too. She was thinking of the strength of Military Artists, but sighed when remembering the troubled look of the head maid. She finished putting the clothes on . She had woken up early but didn't feel like sleeping again. Then the best thing to do was prepare for the next term of school. She drank from the cup next to the bed and went to the desk.

She walked as she thought about Minse.

Minse wasn't part of the topic was probably because he was of the royal family. Besides the Eutnohl, the other two royal families were also elegant. The Queen, Alsheyra Almonise, the Heaven's Blade successor and also the strongest Military Artist in Grendan, and the past head of Ronsmier, Tigris, who died in the last battle. Compared to these two, Minse could only be evaluated as average.

Leerin thought him pitiful. Of course, not that she would let him know.

But things had slowly changed in Grendan since the last battle. The big thing was the death of two Heaven's Blade successors.

Delbone and Tigris.

In terms of age, this could be a smooth handover to the next generation. But the death of two Heaven's Blade successors in one battle had never happened before. This was a big impact to the city .

And no one could had thought that how fortunate it was to win this battle by only losing two Heaven's Blade successors. This saying illustrated just how important the Heaven's Blade successors were to Grendan.

However, one of the casualties was a member of the royal family, Ronsmier's Tigris. Not only did a position of the Heaven's Blade became vacant, but also the head of the Ronsmier family. Claribel, the successor of the Ronsmiers, had left for Zuellni without permission, and so the Ronsmier family was in a warring state of who should be the next head.

Though this was just the problem of the Ronsmier family, which should have no impact on the next Heaven's Blade successor. However, as Claribel was a Military Artist and was expected to inherit a Heaven's Blade, yet she had left Grendan, this had become an issue.

Fermaus was the clear inheritor of Delbone's position. It was rumored that she had already built up a vast net of Psychokinesis. This piece of news was reassuring.

Two Heaven's Blade vacancies were still a problem.

In Alsheyra's generation, it was rare to have not only two, but even one Heaven's Blade position empty. It was difficult to dispel the unease. Anyway, this feeling was natural after that battle.

The Queen seemed to still have no intentions of holding the Heaven's Blade title competition. Leerin had no chance of seeing Alsheyra recently so she didn't know what she was thinking, but she had seen the ministers and the Queen talking about it before she entered the Eutnohl family. The Queen had rejected their request.

It was meaningless to have a Heaven's Blade successor who only looked like one but had no real strength.

That was her answer every time.

Holding a Heaven's Blade didn't mean one could become a Heaven's Blade successor. He must be chosen by the Heaven's Blade itself. However, that had not happened yet.

What should be done?

Just wait? To keep believing that the next Heaven's Blade successor would appear?

Leerin shivered unconsciously as she thought of this. She knew what she had to do and what she could do, so she wasn't confused.

The last beast, Grendan, who was to resist fate had been injured. Leerin too, Alsheyra and the Heaven's Blade successors as well. Would those wounds heal through time? Obviously not.

But the task of waiting showed just how strong Alsheyra was. But the uneasiness didn't disappear. If it was fate to wait for the Heaven's Blade successors to gather together, Leerin thought it wouldn't be too bad to entrust the Heaven's Blade to someone until that time came.

Who would be assured by that? Leerin and the people of Grendan.

Leerin thought of trying to talk to Alsheyra about this, but she was worried. Perhaps it really wasn't all that good for her to get involved in politics.

Because.....

".....Fu."

She put the textbooks together and left the desk. The light shone into the room. Someone had noticed the closed-curtains and pulled them open. Leerin walked onto the balcony.

She felt as if the birds flew away because of her.

But there were no birds. Outside, it was still dim. One would hesitate saying good morning.

"Ah, wait."

But Leerin called out to him.

"..... Yes."

Answering her was a young man standing in the middle of the balcony, getting ready as if to leap. With short hair and appearing to give a few words, he watched her clumsily. If Leerin had known of a guard, unnecessary worries might ensure, and so he had tried not to be noticed, but had failed.

He watched her, embarrassed.

Leerin felt the chill in the air and shivered.

"It's cold. Come in and have a cup of tea."

"Ah, no. I, I....."

"All right. All right. Come in."

"Yes, yes....."

Leerin poured water from the simple hot water dispenser in a corner and started making tea. The maids had said she could call them anytime she needed, but Leerin had finally managed to get them to leave this dispenser here.

The tense young man standing in the balcony was called Eldein Riven. He was older than Leerin. Feeling tense, he said weakly, "I..... I'm thankful for worrying about me. But it's my job to protect your Highness."

Your Highness.

This was how Leerin was called now.

That happened a few days ago.

After Alsheyra held the ceremony in the new palace, naming Leerin a successor. And then she became Leerin Eutnohl. She had officially become the successor of Grendan's throne.

"I'm just one of the candidates. You don't have to worry about it ."

"How can I not!"

How many times had she seen his shocked expression? Inside, Leerin smiled bitterly as she handed him the cup of tea.

She drank too. She had added lots of sugar to the red tea. Ah, her brain would turn slow without sugar.

"Because it seems a Royal Personage is someone who must have lived longer than me."

"Uh, ahah, ah."

Eldein stammered, reflecting her deliberation as he drank the red tea, and as he pondered, heat entered his body that was leaning towards the table.

"Ah, no, but....."

He was troubled. He felt that if he rejected her thought, he would be insulting the Queen, but if he agreed with her then he would be making light of her. It was easy to see his dilemma.

(Is he strong?)

Because of this sudden doubt, Leerin waved her hand up and down aimlessly as he watched.

This must be his reflexes as a guard.

Leerin had learnt most of the knowledge about the royal families and the politics of Grendan at Almonise's home. If one had become a successor, then one's guards belonged to Riven's Military School with people that had gathered together to work for the royal families..... This should have been the case, but Minse had brought Eldein to his house.

Perhaps he had another meaning behind his action.

He must have.

But Leerin hadn't really thought about it.

"Anyway. It's my job to protect your Highness..... Ah!"

He cut himself off and realized it was poor manner to do so.

Leerin smiled.

"Not bad. ‘my’."

"No, but..... this is the job of the royal family, I....."

"It's enough that my uncle trusts you enough to place you beside me."

Her uncle was Minse.

"But, senpai....."

Leerin faced him with a disapproving expression and pointed at his nose.

"Is your current conversational partner your uncle? Senpai? Or me?"

"Of course it's her Highness, Leerin Euthnol."

Leerin nodded in satisfaction at Eldein, who had immediately turned rigid.

"In that case, then if I say this is good enough, then it's good enough."

"Yes..... I understand!"

Leerin smiled at Eldein, who finally managed to calm down. She handed him the cup.

"Then please do your best with your job."

"Yes. Understood!"

Leerin laughed, finding his deferential attitude funny. He also found it funny and smiled bitterly.

"But your Highness, how did you know I would be here at this time?"

He hadn't been here all the time. He was stationed somewhere not too far from Leerin's residence and he went on patrol in case of intruders. Back then, he had just returned to the balcony and was caught off-guard by Leerin's voice.

"Your Highness....."

"That's a girl's secret."

"Uh..... I'm sorry."

Leerin's smile left a puzzled Eldein on the balcony, then she closed the curtain.

He must have wanted to say that she was just a normal person.

But she wasn't your average citizen anymore. She was a candidate to the throne. And had Eldein thought about the blindfold she was wearing?

"..... Well, time to study."

She returned to the desk. Uh, in fact, she didn't really need any guards. She tossed away that thought as her gaze landed on the textbook.

Something felt strange.

This was the feeling Claribel had.

She was reading magazines at home. What she said at Layfon's party was serious. She really wanted to move. There was no other way if Layfon had stayed at the boys' dormitories, but now that he had moved out, it was meaningless for her to stay so far away.

She had her room now. Next was to decorate it, and then to choose some furniture. She had enough money for that.

She herself was a talented Military Artist. To keep the independent life of a busy Academy City, talented Military Artists were like gems. In fact, the money she had now came from negotiations with the Student President Karian. She had to keep this a secret from Nina and the others, that simply being a Military Artist was also a way to earn money.

But that had nothing to do with now.

"What is it?"

She tossed the magazine aside and sat up. Something felt wrong . She remembered that feeling.

"Ah, that means they aren't all destroyed."

For some reason, this was the feeling she had. They should have been all destroyed. She didn't know why she felt their presence, those people who summoned the monster to cover the entirety of Grendan.

The Wolf Faces.

The malicious people who existed on the other side of the world .

She hadn't seen them.

"Is that why I feel like I can sleep better since leaving Grendan?"

At that time, she couldn't fight because of her injury, but she did participate in the defense in front of the palace. What she could see was the monster covering the city and the countless number of live-bullets it spit out. If they had failed to destroy those live-bullets, more would have come to trample on the city.

Claribel had fought in numerous battles, but that was the first time she had fought with pressure. The fight and the blood of the royal three families told her to remove the stress in her and find some place to relax. She had saved Layfon so she could become stronger. Maybe she left not because of wanting to live in Zuellni or her stubbornness to grow stronger, but because she simply wanted to escape.

This was a feeling she was not permitted to have. Claribel denied her own conclusion.

Then what?

She couldn't return to Grendan without having done anything. But her grandfather was dead. And she had left, brushing aside the problem of succeeding as the head of the family.

She couldn't boast of her strength even if she managed to grow enough to hold a Heaven's Blade.

"Then....."

She stood up.

She must go.

She picked up the weapon harness. The only item she brought from Grendan.

Kochouenshiken. A Dite.

All a Military Artist needed was this.

Claribel hid her presence and left through the window. She leaped for the night of Zuellni.

Where was the source of this feeling?

Her gaze kept scanning her surroundings as she leapt.

She felt it.

She changed her path and headed for that feeling. It came from the surrounding area of Layfon's new home.

Then she stopped in front of that building.

"Just what is going on?"

Layfon Alseif had nothing to do with this. That should have been the case. But it seemed Nina had told him about the Wolf Faces. But was that enough to get him involved? Then shouldn't all have seen the Wolf Faces in Grendan?

But that wasn't possible.

If there was some information that Claribel and Nina didn't know...

"Is it all right to make this conclusion?"

Anyway, she had to confirm this presence she felt. The presence inside the building felt like Layfon's, but it seemed there was someone else there beside. If she kept searching, he would find out her presence. Normally Claribel would sneak a peek while hiding her presence, but now she was ignoring it.

Compared to this, just what were the Wolf Faces doing?

Claribel had stopped here, but her target was nowhere in sight.

"Even deeper? Where?"

She concentrated.

At that time, a girl was trapped.

There were many masks. They were people who had the face of beast but hadn't become beast themselves.

They had the same pose, as if they were people reflected in a mirror. They possessed tremendous power, but because of that they had fallen. But they couldn't ignore everything because they held great power.

The Wolf Faces.

They surrounded the girl. It was a strange event, but the ending was matter of fact.

The girl was silent.

She stood there, in this strange situation without a sense of fear.

"Why?"

The voice that sounded like fairies in a forest continued to enclose her.

"..... Why? Just what is going on?"

The girl wasn't afraid.

"Why. You've descended but have done nothing. Then....."

The echo was full of confusion. The girl stood in contrast, without any confusion.

She was tall, but not that tall. And her facial expression didn't change in front of the Wolf Faces. The Wolf Faces stopped.

What she wore was a uniform. A General Studies uniform of Zuellni.

And that was confusing the Wolf Faces.

"Durindana had finished its job."

"Yes. The third mother form has finished its job."

The girl nodded. Like the nod of a robot. Their doubt vanished in the face of her Psychokinesist-like manner of speaking.

"That's why I'm here. What's not appropriate?"

"Then why haven't you finished the goal?"

From the voice alone the girl seemed at peace. But if one was to look at it deeper perhaps it felt a tiny bit of worry. Even a powerful person would feel the pain of death. In order to reach one's goal, there were Military Artists who aimed for revenge and got killed, there were those who got annihilated by the red-haired avenger, there were those who got caught up in it. They all experienced the pain of death.

All for today.

The arrival of Durindana that covered the entire Grendan was the ending she was fated to see. When she flew, the moon fell. This world that was full of lies became ashes, and the door to the real world was opened. The Wolf Faces continued to fight so they could be freed from death.

But why was this person in this place, pretending to be a student in this Academy City?

The Wolf Faces continued to ask.

"In order to reach my goal."

But the girl's expression wasn't as intense. Her beauty that was like delicate glass and cold metal remained unruffled.

"But according to my speculation, your goal and mine aren't the same."

"Your goal....."

"My goal is to destroy this world, but that isn't all of it."

The Wolf Faces were silent.

They waited for the next utterance.

But she changed the topic. "Because of Durindana's passage, the hole has expanded. When we invade, that means your goal is reached. Now I've become the highest commander. The next order is to wait."

The simple wordings resisted her cold attitude. The atmosphere became tense.

"..... To wait. Wait where?"

Fear seeped through the question.

The girl's next words left no room for negotiation.

"Wait in the Zero Territory. That which is now called the "moon ", Airen's territory. That isn't a sealed off dimension. This dimension isn't good for a fight that requires you to save your energy. I feel that there's another force in this world that can fight you. And so, wait in that dimension. That isn't inappropriate."

"Stop joking!"

The Wolf Faces were in disarray. Their voices echoed like on a mountain.

They were wailing.

The Wolf Faces that could only maintain their power through numbers turned into one single organism, wailing.

"You, to make us stay in that place....."

"If you can remain calm, you can also feel comfortable in the Zero Territory. Please control yourself."

The Wolf Faces were speechless. Their reaction really didn't fit their name.

If just one person had enough of a strong will, then the Wolf Faces wasn't a group of people who loved the safety offered by a group. The person whom Leerin and Nina met in the other Academy City had become a Wolf Face.

But the Wolf Faces didn't continue the conversation.

They couldn't communicate.

It was impossible for her to understand even if they were to tell her humans' weaknesses.

They were prepared.

"I'm sorry, I can't obey this order."

The voice was intense.

The Wolf Faces had decided. Their effort hadn't paid off, and still, they wouldn't obey her. Even if they were to become enemies.

"Then this is betrayal. Can I comprehend it this way?"

Warning. Her voice was devoid of emotion. Fear shrouded the Wolf Faces once more. But they successfully kept it down. The fear that was deeper than that of waiting in the Zero Territory united the Wolf Faces.

"There is no other choice."

"I'm sorry."

They replied honestly.

And both sides took action simultaneously.

The weapons in the hands of the Wolf Faces were restored.

They attacked together in the confused situation. Wielding the weapons without fear. Attacking with everything they had, stabbing the girl.

The blades slid through the girl's body. Countless number of blades cut through her. She should have become pitiful pieces of meat, but that wasn't the case.

The girl stood there. She just stood.

There was no injury on her body. Not a drop of blood. Even her clothes were undamaged. She just stood there.

"I've confirmed the evidence of your betrayal. Now I'll annihilate you," she said without any expression.

"Ssss."

One of the Wolf Faces howled. The point of the blade was inside the girl's body, but he couldn't feel anything with it.

He knew they had failed.

Failed. They couldn't win.

They must escape.

There was no time.

The girl hadn't moved.

But the Wolf Faces had been hit.

"I'll once more turn your bodies into Aurora atoms. Change the data into experience. Perhaps you will be sealed and then eliminated."

A cold declaration.

The Wolf Faces were terrified. They could do nothing. They had no way of resisting. Even if they could, it was meaningless as they had lost their substance. Not just the feeling of flesh but even the density of their shadows was thinning, revealing the view behind them..... then they vanished

And so without having done anything, their figures vanished.

"....."

All existence outside of the girl's vanished. For the first time, she moved a part of her body that wasn't her lips.

Lifted her head.

In the night sky was the moon.

She was looking at the moon.

"Airen Garfield. Your sacrifice is different from mine, isn't it?" she asked the moon. But it remained silent. The light of the pure and cold moon spread across the surface of the air filter. The screen of dust and sand reflected a crescent. Though this was a scene of illusion, the girl's expression didn't change.

He wanted to protect this world. Even though he had to become the moon, he still did it to protect the people of this world. He insisted on completing his mission even though the heart of the other side had changed. He was this kind of a person.

The two points had a huge difference between them, and the girl took on this form in this world so that she could better understand it. The sacrifice of Durindana and the betrayal of the Wolf Faces paled into insignificance compared to it.

That figure was like a bird flying in from the dark as it landed beside the girl.

A long, dark ponytail bounced up and dark. This person looked to be about the same age as the girl.

"What're you doing here?"

"I'm taking a stroll."

"Really....." the dark haired girl didn't look convinced. "Has anything strange happened in this area?"

"No," the girl shook her head.

"I see. Then everything is fine. Sorry for disturbing your walk."

"No, it's fine. I'm just about to head back."

The dark haired girl left. The girl wasn't worried and left this piece of land devoid of the Wolf Faces.

Scanning the night sky of Zuellni again, Claribel didn't feel at ease. Just what was going on..... She couldn't calm herself down no matter what.

"What's happening. What's happening....."

She recalled her, the girl without emotions. She met her before the feeling of fear. A conversation that was extremely short, and that was the limit of Claribel.

"Oh, what is your name?"

"I'm Vati Len."

"I see. I'm Claribel Ronsmier."

"Please look after me."

The girl lowered her head. All Claribel saw was a normal girl wearing the General Studies uniform and then she had forgotten all about the Wolf Faces as she ran back to her dormitory.

She knew it.

"What is happening?"

She was running away. She couldn't do anything before that girl but stood there.

It was fear.

Vati Len?

Something ominous filled this name.

Nina felt the same as Claribel. Something felt wrong. She was with Harley at that time. She had come to help him move the things he collected from the rubbish dump. They bound up some of the boxes with a rope and moved them into the research lab Harley had borrowed from the Alchemy department.

"I can save some money this way," Harley said happily as Nina walked with a sour smile.

"……? What's it?" Harley turned around and asked as Nina had suddenly stopped in her track.

"……. Nothing."

It was a strange feeling, but she didn't know what it was. She felt that it was related to the Wolf Faces, but she was inexperienced in this area. Was her inability to fully comprehend the meaning behind this feeling representing something?

She pressed a hand on her chest with her head turned sideway. Harley also made the same gesture.

"Do you feel uncomfortable?"

"No. It's not that."

"I see. Give them to me if you're tired."

"It's okay. Let's go," she urged.

Perhaps he felt better about the situation having seen Nina's reaction. He opened the box. This was about moving. He was very satisfied with Layfon's new home. Now that Harley signed the contract and created his own research lab, he was full of spirit.

How to renovate the room? That must be the topic. But she couldn't understand him if she didn't pay close attention because of the jargon he kept using. She had already given up listening to him.

Her concentration was elsewhere.

Worried. This sense of worry was making her heart beat faster. She felt that something needed to be done. This was the feeling she had.

"..... Nina?"

"Sorry, Harley. I'll definitely move this."

"Eh? Wait....."

She ignored the protest of her childhood friend and left the boxes.

To where?

She didn't know, but her body didn't hesitate. Her brain knew nothing but her body knew where to go. No, to put it more accurately, her instincts were urging her body to move. Nina ran without regard of the situation. She ran farther and farther away,

closer and closer to her target, and her body felt weaker. Her heart beat faster. She must stop. She should stop what she was doing now and return to Harley, telling him it was nothing with a smile and continuing to help him move the boxes.

She had never ignored things around her.

What had happened?

She didn't know. She didn't understand but something incredible was taking place.

She knew the other her felt tired too. Because of forcibly making her body obey her will even though it wanted to escape, her two legs that were running in the night sky of Zuellni felt heavier than usual. Her jumping height and distance weren't on par with her usual self.

Strange.

Why did she resist going there so much?

She was going to confirm something.

Nina jumped.

She was surprised that the landing place was close to Layfon's new home, but what was she more surprised about was that she didn't notice Claribel was somewhere not far from her.

What was here?

Her fingertip felt the Dite in her weapon harness. The air of a silent night surrounded her. The heat of summer should have passed. The season had turned colder, but Nina was sweating.

She was sweating so much at this distance. Unbelievable.

"Damn."

She didn't understand the situation. Her heart was like it was curled into a ball as she scolded herself.

At this time, her body reacted to her sensation.

She turned around. Someone was coming.

She didn't need to concentrate. That figure was getting closer under the dim light of the street lamp. Behind Nina was Layfon's building. There weren't many residents yet.

She looked like a normal girl, walking slowly in the dark in the uniform of the General Studies department. She looked pretty but was a normal girl.

But the tension in Nina didn't ease. Her hand didn't leave her weapon harness.

Irritation filled her.

And before long, the other also sensed it.

(Melnisc?)

(Ro, roooooo.....)

Somewhere deep inside her, Melnisc was howling in terror. But it wasn't like the feeling that Nina had, of being overwhelmed by an unidentifiable sense of tension and fear. Melnisc felt like it was about to go insane from fury.

The girl was heading straight for her.

And then she stopped before Nina.

"Could you move aside?"

She was unshakable before Nina as she coldly uttered her words that didn't match the current atmosphere.

"..............!"

Her feet wanted to move, but Nina willed them to stay.

Not that the girl couldn't enter the building if Nina didn't move. But the girl had stopped in front of her. She didn't say "get lost". She just said "move aside".

It really was.....

"What are you planning?"

"It's a fighting strength that suits you. You are named Nina Antalk, born in the City of Schneibel. Before now you had become one with an Electronic Fairy. Other factors need to be studied to account for your current fighting strength."

"Oh."

She knew Nina well.

"But it's a very low possibility that you can eliminate me with your current power. And I don't want to become your enemy now. I don't like meaningless fights. Can you move aside?"

"You....." Nina repeated like a broken toy.

"I'm Vati Len. I'll be studying in Zuellni in the next term."

"It....."

It shouldn't be like this. She wanted to say it but she couldn't. What should she do after denying her. To fight this girl named Vati Len?

She didn't know why calling this girl's name gave her sense a strong ominous feeling. But this wasn't the time.

What she should do now was take care of the current situation.

To fight? Or to move away?

She should move aside. She wouldn't win.

No. She had had a similar experience many times already. Didn't she overcome them one by one? But this time it was different.

To overcome it. To do it everything she had regardless of what would happen to her.

She didn't even think of that now.

(Ro..... roooo.....)

Melnisc howled in her. A storm. But Nina didn't move with his anger. She could borrow the strength of the Haikizoku. And the Dite in her weapon harness had the Electronic Fairy, Zuellni's power. It wouldn't break under the Kei of the Haikizoku.

But Nina didn't think that was enough to defeat this girl.

(Ro..... Reu.....) Melnisc said.

"Lævateinn.....?"

"How do you know its name?"

Vati's expression remained unchanged, but Nina's feet moved because of that question.

She had stepped back to gain some distance.

To run away.

Now, she had run away.

"Damn....."

"Never mind. I won't get to the depths of it. But forget about doing something to me."

Vati moved.

"Tsk!"

Her body was shivering.

"....."

Vati was silent. She moved past Nina and entered the building.

"At that time I just wanted to destroy this city, but I'll reach that goal in the next city."

"Wait! You....."

Nina regained her sense of self and wanted to chase after the girl.

But her feet wouldn't move. Her flesh had been resisting her from the start. Her heart was giving up. She didn't have the strength to make her body obey.

What goal was it.....?

Nina didn't even get to ask that question as she stood there.

Vati disappeared into Layfon's building. And next Nina's consciousness entered a false world as if she was dragged by the Haikizoku.

This was a dream.

But it was the truth that Karian was plagued by it after that day.

The day when the monster covered Grendan. Karian had chosen to stay in the Mechanical Department so that he could confirm the repairing progress of the city as the city shook intensely.

He felt that someone was calling him. This happened when he finished talking with the person with the burden, while he was coming back to himself.

The machines were here, their noise seemingly more intense than usual, but it was gently pushed away by the sound of bells. Perhaps Zuellni was calling. As if captured by that voice in the passing of time, Karian changed the direction of his feet.

And he arrived in the central area of the Mechanical Department.

"Did you call me?"

He saw the huge central area with an expectant feeling. The Electronic Fairy was inside the gem, looking at him gently.

"Is something wrong? If it's not important, then stay back a little . You also want me to concentrate on fixing the city....."

And he stopped.

He had to.

Gloom overcame Zuellni's face. He didn't know how to react to that change so he looked at her silently, waiting for her reaction. Then he sensed the change.

Not from the Electronic Fairy.

But from the Selenium rocks around her.

Fog. Or a cloud of dense dust rushed out. In a split second, the dust ignored the weak air current in this area and stopped between Karian and the Electronic Fairy as it took human form.

A person.

A mature woman.

But Karian didn't know those clothes. It looked like clothes that Military Artists wore so to be able to maximize their movement.

He should have felt the danger he was in, but he didn't sense it. It was already too late when he noticed it. The option of running away was gone, and so he chose another way.

"Who are you?"

"I'm Lævateinn. Nano-Celluloid Interface 1 Lævateinn. I'm the commander of Durindana, who is now fighting outside."

".....Why are you here?"

He was terrified. But he had nothing to gain by showing his weak side here. An iron will defeated his weakness as he continued to speak.

Lævateinn was here without doing anything. It must have another goal. Anyway, Zuellni's reaction didn't feel like she was reacting to an enemy. In that case he must find out Lævateinn's goal.

"If I were to declare it I'd say please allow me to destroy this world in the near future."

"Why?"

"Otherwise my master and I would not be freed. Because we are bound by this world."

"....."

Karian didn't quite understand the meaning of it. But he understood the cause and reason. This world was interfering with Lævateinn and its master's movement, and so it wanted to destroy this world. It was better than not knowing the reason.

"But there is something we must do before that."

"That is....."

Didn't that woman – Lævateinn say something at that time?

He woke from his dream. His body didn't move but his eyes were opened. He realized he was in his own room. He was so busy this year that he barely had time to visit his home. But recently he had made time to return.

He wanted to see his sister.

There was little time left.

The time he had to remain in this city, and the time he had to spend with his sister. Or the time they had to live in this world.

Actually, there was plenty of time. Perhaps people tended to drag out the things they were to do. There was always time to meet his sister. Even after leaving the Academy City, he would still have time to return to his homeland.

He thought so.

But perhaps that time would be gone. Perhaps whatever he did now would not help the situation just like the crisis Zuellni was facing.

Not feeling tired anymore, Karian left the room with the intention of brewing a cup of tea.

Felli was in the living room.

"Ah, you're already up?"

"Did you ask after having seen the time?"

He checked the time. It was time to wake up.

"I see. I've overslept."

"..... Are you tired?"

He thought she might be still mad like before, but her conversation was extremely normal. He felt that he was progressing somewhat.

He was happy yet sad. So hard to comprehend. He smiled sourly and dusted away the remnants of his dream. Before he had seen the problem that needed solving. Now was the time to solve it . And the future was to draw success.

"There's tea in the teapot. Do you want me to brew some?"

"Thanks. We haven't had breakfast together for a long time."

"..... Not that we have done anything together."

She watched the kitchen and took up Karian's cup.

Now was the time to pass the time of now.

The little time left for now that he wanted to see.

That dimension didn't exist.

It was called En.

A network between Regios that people couldn't see. An information network.

In the false dimension were two figures facing each other.

One was a girl of weak light.

The other was a beautiful figure of a half human, half bird.

Zuellni and Schneibel. Nina and Melnisc spoke at the same time in this dimension.

"This is....."

She immediately realized something had changed.

Vati Len. The woman exuding a sense of danger, one that Nina couldn't do anything about. The woman whom Melnisc called Lævateinn. For that, the two had met in this dimension.

When Nina realized the situation, Schneibel had stopped speaking.

"I understand the situation."

"....."

"You've been infiltrated. Right?"

"....."

Zuellni didn't reply.

"Concentrating on Durindana's attack, you hadn't realized Lævateinn's presence. Starting from me, every Electronic Fairy had missed her. I can't scold you for that."

"....."

Zuellni lowered her gaze in dejection.

"Besides, we can't do anything in this situation. Not only the Heaven's Blade successors, but even the Queen is subjected to Durindana's binding. Every power in this world is bound. That is probably the fault of us Regios," Schneibel said without changing her expression. She wasn't robotic. She had just had years and years to suppress her emotions.

"But it was possible to contact us about it. Zuellni, you should have known."

"....."

But Zuellni kept her silence.

Zuellni herself felt Schneibel's irritation. But she remained silent . The crisp, bell-like voice that Nina had heard before didn't defend itself.

"Why didn't you contact us? Or is it because it is an Academy City?"

"....."

"But this problem isn't the same as the red haired beast and darkness. This is related to the crisis of this world. You should understand that being an Academy City isn't enough to explain your action."

"....."

In Schneibel's expression was disapproval that Nina couldn't understand.

Schneibel couldn't guess the scope of meaning behind Zuellni's silence. Not that Zuellni couldn't speak of it. Schneibel had done a thorough research in Zuellni's situation before initiating communication through En. She didn't notice anything strange caused by Lævateinn's presence.

And if Zuellni had been so exhausted that she couldn't contact Schneibel, how did it explain her being able to communicate from the beginning through En?

So that meant Zuellni was using silence to protect her own thoughts.

For what?

Even the mother of all Electronic Fairies – Schneibel, didn't know. What was Zuellni thinking?

"Why don't you speak!"

Even Nina didn't understand.

"Zuellni!"

Zuellni replied Nina's painful question with silence.

"You're admitting in silence. Is that true? Why? Because you lost ? You gave me power. Because of that? Zuellni. Answer me!"

Zuellni continued to keep her silence. For the Academy City. For Nina's passion. But she still kept her silence.

"Why don't you say a word!"

"....."

"You're still treating me like an outsider!"

"....."

"Zuellni?"

Nina's pain filled the dimension. The dimension echoed her heart.

This was proof that the substance of the Electronic Fairy in Nina's body was growing normally, or that the substance that

would become the new hope was her. But the process of factoring in the safety of the Academy City in Schneibel's question was already gone.

She must make a decision.

"All right."

Schneibel looked at the determined girl. At the Electronic Fairy that selflessly sacrificed herself for the people in her city.

In her, all emotions were eliminated.

"I won't ask again of your issue. But as one who bears the responsibility for the structure of this world, we must destroy Lævateinn."

"....."

"If you interfere with this, you'll become our enemy."

"....."

Zuellni lowered her head sadly.

"Is that fine?"

The girl nodded.

"Zuellni. Why?" Nina's wail couldn't be communicated.

And at this moment, the Academy City Zuellni had become the enemy of the world.

Epilogue: And the One They Face

Bound by metal ropes, the roaming bus was lifted up.

His stomach turned as the shaking caused by the bus bumping into the materials to slow down the contact between the bus and the outer edge stopped.

"Ahh, I was used to this six years ago."

He brushed away the hair that blocked his vision because of the shaking. He sighed. The bento and the nutrient pills in his stomach turned. This discomfort made him pale.

"Getting clumsy? Or is it because of age?" Karian mocked the person sitting beside him, and then smiled sourly.

"I'm not the same as you."

"You said that."

The man beside him smiled.

The man, Vance's smile, Karian couldn't take his eyes off him.

".....What the, this is disgusting."

"Ah, you've been smiling a lot since graduation."

"True. I've been released from the pressure. What else can I do but smile."

After noticing that Vance was contradicting his own words, Karian stood up and grabbed hold of his own luggage. The two of them were wearing durable clothes because they needed to journey far away.

They weren't wearing Zuellni's uniform anymore.

It took them some time to get to the city named Metelo.

They got off the roaming bus.

"It's nostalgic to see you here," Karian said as they headed for the residence for outsiders.

"Geez, our route is the same till now. But are we to part here?"

"We'll part like this?"

"Then our fate to meet ends here."

Something was hidden behind their casual conversation. They both knew it but didn't show it as they kept walking. Inside Karian's mind floated the scene of the graduating ceremony.

The new Student President Samiraya gave her speech. Her short stature as she spoke seriously into the microphone made everyone laugh.

He felt discomfort, but he had changed his mindset while waiting on the roaming bus.

"Gorneo, that fellow has too much energy when he's looking after Shante's recovery."

Karian patted Vance's back nonchalantly, comforting him. Of course, with a smile.

Vance watched him with anger.

"Really, your bad habit hasn't changed since I first met you."

"I've been growing, but it's not easy to change. You too."

"Um....."

"Growing and changing aren't the same. We've grown but haven't changed. That's the case. But if you've changed, as the head of the Military Arts department, I wouldn't wish for it."

"Your tongue is still as sharp as ever."

"Yes. And so I know how and when to use my sharp tongue. That's my growth."

"Really, you haven't changed."

They smiled as they headed for the hotel.

They both knew this ending as they walked step by step. There was probably still some time left as they waited for the next roaming bus. But they felt that that time was meaningless.

Perhaps they wouldn't have the chance to speak this anymore.

And so they were confirming the ending.

If there existed some deviation, "time" must be it.

Vance thought here existed something they had in common.

Karian thought differently.

And the difference was obvious when they reached the hotel.

"You're finally here. We've been waiting."

Vance understood when he heard the greeting.

At the entrance of the hotel. Passengers of the roaming buses were all here to go through the administration process so they could stay in this city while waiting for the next bus.

Vance couldn't believe the male and female pair he saw who were ignoring everyone else around them.

"Sorry for making you wait. How's the preparation with the bus ?"

"All done. Including the guard and the driver. You will look just like a rich young man."

"Then I'll gladly accept your words. Anyway, what is left to prepare is my wallet."

Vance was startled.

Karian took over. "Hey," he said to Vance, a friend he had been with for six years in Zuellni.

"What's going on?"

"There's something I have to do."

"What?"

"But it's not something I can do by myself. So I need guards. But there aren't many guards that I personally know."

"So you've hired them?"

"So I've hired them."

Various emotions rolled over Vance at Karian's calm attitude.

"Don't want to come with me and greet them?"

"You have your own city to return to, and there's an obstacle too . I'm sorry, but I don't want you to worry about me. On that level, they are quite capable too."

"Really....."

Vance lifted his head. All kinds of words whirled in his mind, but he swallowed them all.

"..... Yes. We aren't from the same city anymore."

"Yes. And we aren't comrades of the same path."

"I see," Vance nodded and patted Karian's shoulder. The thin figure shook at his patting.

"Then goodbye."

"Yes. Goodbye."

They parted.

Looking at his friend vanish amidst the crowd heading for the hotel, Karian turned to his new companions.

Looking at him who had a tattoo over his left eye.

"Then, let's listen to our client's request one more time."

"Uh, that, it's a bit embarrassing," Karian said, but he didn't look shy at all.

"It's world peace."

He declared and took a step.

To the hotel.

For a new journey.